Title: A journey towards becoming a systemic practitioner: becoming a project manager and an educationalist

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A JOURNEY TOWARDS BECOMING A SYSTEMIC PRACTITIONER: BECOMING A PROJECT MANAGER AND AN EDUCATIONALIST

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Professional Doctorate in Systemic Practice

January 2013

A JOURNEY TOWARDS BECOMING A SYSTEMIC PRACTITIONER: BECOMING A PROJECT MANAGER AND AN EDUCATIONALIST

By

Ian Joseph Cammack

A thesis submitted to the University of Bedfordshire, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Professional Doctorate in Systemic Practice**.**

January 2013

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Ian Joseph Cammack

Abstract

This thesis is a systemic examination of my practice as an educator specialising in the development of early career project managers. This inquiry is conducted through an internal inquiry into my living theory and an externally focussed inquiry into the journey that the early career project managers take to becoming a project manager.

Four broad foci of my living theory are identified, 'Soft Systems Methodology', 'Action Learning', 'Reflective Practice' and 'Systemic Practice'. These are discussed in order to consciously consider the foundations of my practice and to identify areas where the practice has been eroded through familiarity and developed through innovation.

The external inquiry draws on three sources of qualitative data. The first two sources of data explore the experiences of students enrolled on the MSc in Project Management at Lancaster University during an action learning project. These two sources are an analysis of 'word clouds' and 'critical incidents' presented in the dissertations that reflect on these projects. The third source of data is a series of interviews held with alumni of the MSc in Project Management at Lancaster University.

These two areas of inquiry combine to present a framework for project management practitioner education that comprises of three broad areas of development. These areas of development align to the 'ways of knowing', 'ways of doing' and 'ways of being'. The ways of knowing zone is made up of the development of a systematic approach to project management. This zone is complemented by the 'ways of doing' that looks at the development of this systematic perspective through the development of a range of analytical and social skills. It is suggested that systemic eloquence may be gained by enhancing the 'ways of knowing' and 'ways of doing' with a systemic perspective that encompasses relational dispositions to the practice of project management. This relational disposition covers the ways in which project managers learn to understand the dynamics of the problem situations that they co-create with their stakeholders.

Furthermore, it is noted that the development of project management practitioners should be facilitated through their experience in the practice of projects. This 'hands on' engagement combined with an approach to self-development founded on reflective practice helps to develop people capable of delivering projects rather than talking about the delivery of projects.

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Acknowledgments

Firstly, I want to thank my supervisor, Professor Ravi Kohli, for his support and advice over the duration of the professional doctorate. In addition, I thank Graham Hackett for inviting me into the world of practitioner development as well as Steve Kempster and Graeme Pyle for their generous help and encouragement during the development of my practice. Special thanks are extended to Liu Peng and my colleagues at Beijing Foreign Studies University for their warmth and hospitality during my stay there.

This thesis and my emerging practice would not have been possible without the encouragement and support of the students enrolled on the MSc in Project Management at Lancaster University. Thanks to you all; especially Rute Lago Matos, Pablo Uribe, Siyan Lu, Anna Stefankova, Caroline Kanso, Vina Nannan Tang, Lebene Soga, Diyu Tang, Kara Wang, Nooch Kaewla-iad, Yen Chuan-Liou, Alan Forsyth, Helen Bircher and Xuan Qiu. Likewise, thanks to those participants who allowed me to interview them and shared their experiences of 'Becoming a Project Manager'.

The cartoons in this thesis are the work of Helen Graham who has done a great job in bringing to life key moments of my academic journey.

Finally, thank you to Guo Jia and my parents for their unconditional love and total support during the completion of this thesis.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Professional Doctorate in Systemic Practice at the University of Bedfordshire.

It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

Name of candidate: Ian Cammack Signature:

Date: 21st January 2013

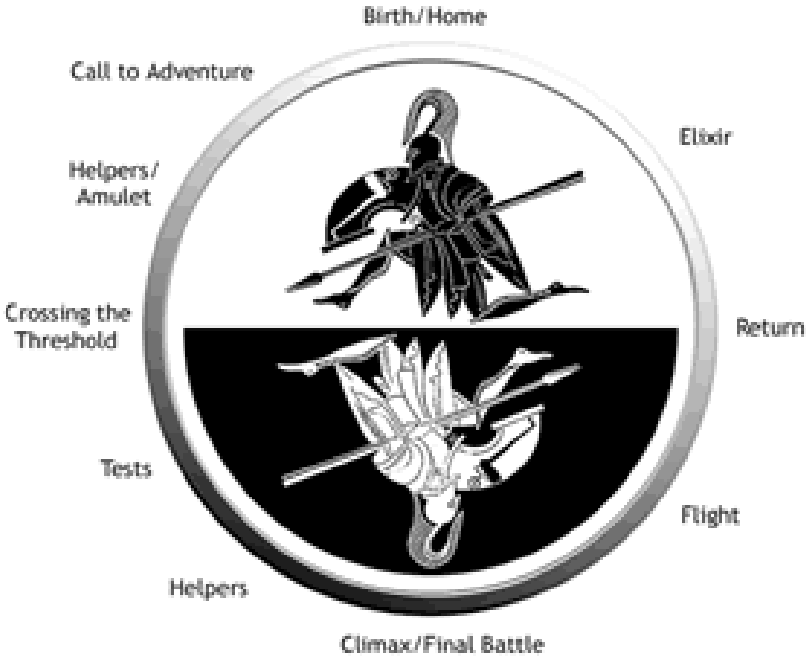
Glossary / List of Abbreviations

Association for Project Management (APM)	A professional body that seeks to promote project management practice in a range of contexts. Historically the geographical orientation of this body has been the UK and Commonwealth countries.
Body of Knowledge (BoK)	Created by one of the professional bodies (i.e. APM or PMI) this is an account of the professional knowledge that is deemed necessary to deliver a project.
Earned Value Management (EV)	A project management technique that provides objective data on the schedule and delivery performance.
LUMS	Lancaster University Management School
Management Development Division (MDD)	Outreach unit within the Management School of Lancaster University. This unit specialised in delivering post experience courses in management.
Professional Development Unit (PDU)	Outreach unit within the Engineering Department of Lancaster University. This unit specialised in delivering post experience courses in project management.
Project Lifecycle	The project lifecycle consists of a series of stages that a project proceeds through from Initiation to Closure.
Project Management Institute (PMI)	A professional body that seeks to promote project management practice in a range of contexts. Historically the geographical orientation of this

	body has the United States of America.
Soft Systems Methodology (SSM)	A problem structuring technique developed by Peter Checkland and Brian Wilson. This approach to messy problem situations seeks to have a holistic perspective to problem situations and to consider these from different perspectives.
Work Breakdown Structure (WBS)	A project management technique that seeks to identify all of the components required to deliver a project through a decomposition of the project deliverables.

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION: “A CALL TO ADVENTURE”



1. INTRODUCTION: "A CALL TO ADVENTURE"

1.1. Introduction

This thesis documents a systemic inquiry into my professional practice as a project management educator. To introduce the thesis I will do three things in this chapter. Firstly, I will introduce myself and my practice at Lancaster University Management School (LUMS). Secondly, I will position the research questions that I will explore in this thesis. Thirdly, I will provide an overview of the structure of the thesis.

1.2. Professional Introduction

Welcome to my professional world. My name is Ian Cammack and I am a teaching fellow at LUMS. Whilst the 'traditional' focus of a teaching fellow is to be a commercial account manager for corporate programmes, in my case the journey that is told in this thesis has encompassed both professional growth and the development of a new course for aspiring professionals. As such this journey has been unique. Since 2002 I have been responsible for the design, delivery and direction of a full-time MSc course in Project Management. From my perspective the key purpose of this course is to facilitate the development of 'mindful practitioners'. By this I mean those practitioners who are mindfully aware of the context they are working in and are also able to draw on appropriate theory which they can deploy in a considered and reflective manner. The outcome is the delivery of sustainable value to society, their project stakeholders and themselves. The structure, content and pedagogy of this programme are introduced in Appendix 1.

My professional practice is represented in Rich Pictures 1 and 2 (below) which illustrate my relationships with colleagues, the university and the students that I seek to serve.

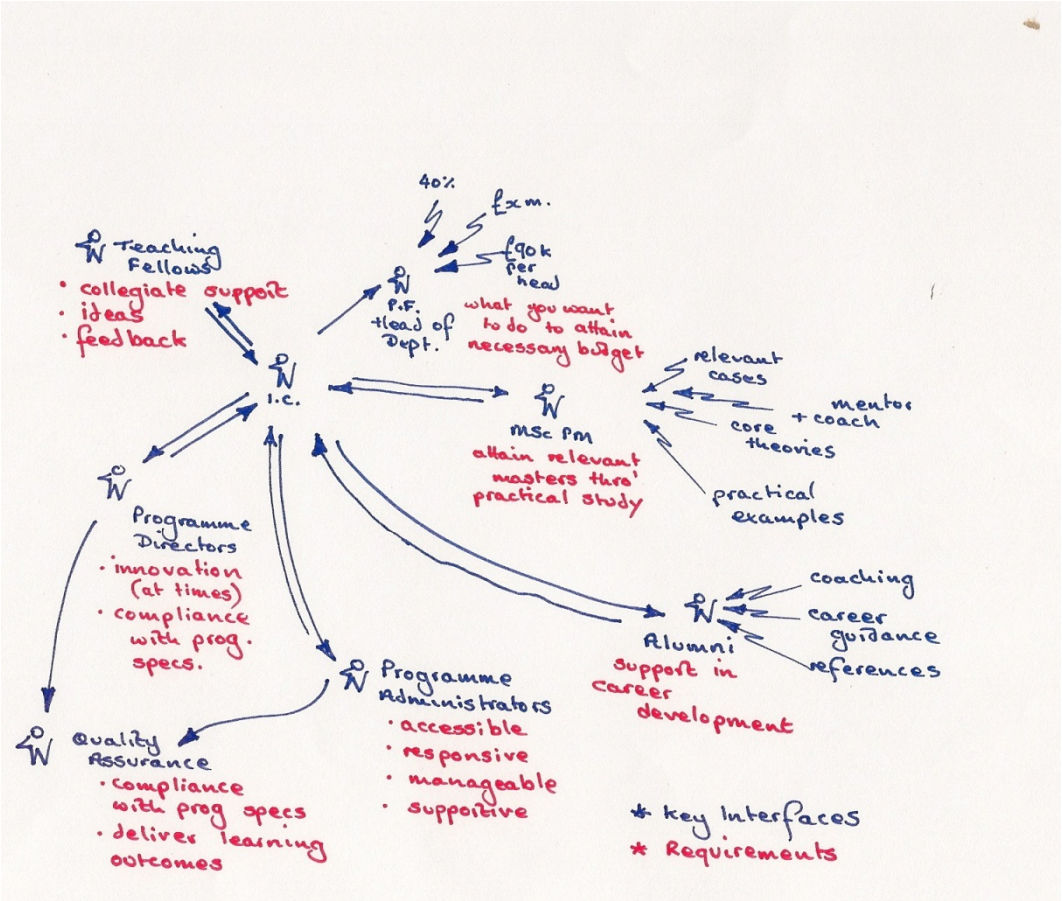


Figure 1: The Context of My Practice
Source: author

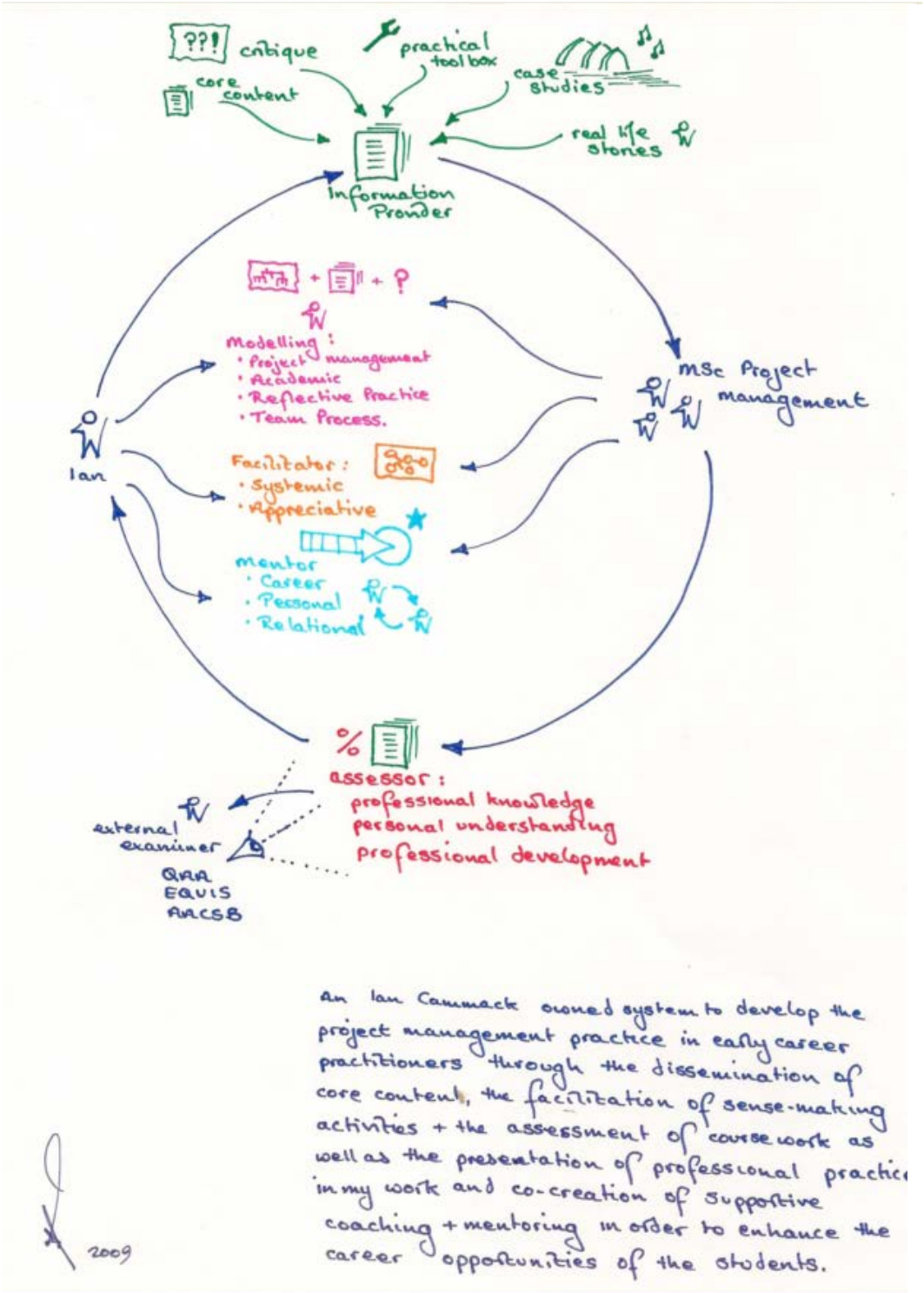


Figure 2 Rich Picture of My Practice
Source: author

The rich picture in Figure 1 provides an overview of my role in a wider context. It illustrates some of the affordances and constraints that influence my practice, for example the department's requirement for a financial contribution. However the motivation force behind my practice is not found in the internal systems or structures in place at LUMS. Nor is it found in my endeavours to be an active researcher. I see my students investing a year of their lives to engage in a course that will develop their careers. My motivation, drawn from a belief that teaching is a vocation, is to see that they gain the richest experience possible and in the process gain a significant return on their investment.

This worldview has its roots in my experience of education. In 1981 I was a 'young' 18 year old studying Managerial Science at Lancaster University. I was a person who dozed off in the Micro-Economics lectures about rats' propensity to consume root beer or water. I was a person who was baffled by the concept and application of differential calculus to the work of managers. I was a person who was lost in a sea of 250 other people studying various forms of management degrees. Fortunately Lancaster University is a flexible institution and I was able to graduate with BA Hons. in Ancient History. Yet here I am in the same institution 'teaching' management. Sometimes I wonder how I have made this journey.

The period between myself being a recipient of management education to becoming a creator of management education has seen me occupy a number of professional project management roles. My grounding in project management came from working on multi-million pound data conversion projects, for example managing the conversion of the BBC gramophone library catalogue which comprised of over 7,000,000 recordings and provided one year's employment for 200 people. However, later on in my career I worked on organisational change management projects within the telecoms and utilities sectors. Often these projects were much smaller in terms of both cost and resource but at the same

time they were much more ‘political’ in their nature as they sought to create a uniform way of working or deliver a rationalisation of services.

My entry into the world of teaching, my **‘**Call to the Adventure’ was presented at a particularly stressful time. Within a fortnight I had seen the project I was directing win a major quality award, and paradoxically I was also made redundant. A lifeline came in the form of an advert for a position within Lancaster University’s Professional Development Unit (PDU), at the time attached to the School of Engineering. The key responsibility of this role was to teach project management to managers and engineers on part-time certificate and MSc courses.

I am not a very outgoing person and the thought of teaching filled me with some trepidation. However, I reconciled this in my mind by seeing that the courses I would be teaching on were short intensive three or four daylong events and if it all went badly wrong I would soon be starting afresh with the next course, building on the practical experience from lessons learnt rather than being swamped by the continuing context of a demanding change initiative over which I had no control.

On entering the PDU I found myself working with students from a variety of engineering contexts including nuclear decommissioning, telecoms and defence. Their motivation was to achieve a validation of their experience whilst at the same time developing an enhanced skillset for their future professional practice. In many ways I felt as if I was a fish out of water. Indeed, I was an Ancient Historian working amongst engineers. I was curious as to how my experience of projects that were often managed without an explicit methodology could add value to these professionals who sought to apply a discipline to their practice. In truth I was apprehensive about the legitimacy of my practice.

In considering options for approaching this new world I reflected back on the disconnected experience I had had in my undergraduate studies. This became an acid test for my practice. Do my students feel lost on their learning journey? Do they appreciate the relationship between the 'classroom' and their future practice? And, do they see my practice as being respectful of theirs?

These three key questions, drawn from my early experience with rats, calculus and ivory tower pedagogy, remain at the heart of my practice. They drive this current inquiry into my practice as much as they drove the initial steps I took over ten years ago. Appendix 2 develops this appreciation of the foundations to my teaching practice through a process of circular questioning.

1.3 Why This Investigation is Meaningful to Me

This thesis is framed by two episodes. The first episode is a moment from 2002 when standing before an audience of students I was struck by how empty my practice felt. The session was for a cohort of students on an MSc in Information Technology and the Management of Organisational Change programme. These students were not project management specialists and may not have been conscious of the subject prior to the module. The learning objectives for the course were to provide a theoretically robust account of the processes and procedures of project management. However, as I was relaying this information to the students I could hear my inner voice telling me that this was an empty shell. I could feel the lack of engagement from the students as the material was accepted without curiosity, challenge or critique. In reflecting on this experience I described to a colleague how in this moment I felt the breath of the *Dementors* on my face. In Rowling's (1999) works these mythical creatures suck out the soul of their victims causing them to lose their minds (see Figure 3 'The Tipping Point', below).

Figure 3: The Tipping Point
Source: Graham (2011)

I felt as if my accidental career was of very limited value and that I could not sustain this. Thinking about this further I asked myself "Where did the breath come from?" By this I meant what factors gave rise to this problem situation and what could I change in *my* practice to increase the value of these sessions for future cohorts.

As I reflected on this episode I chose to 'let go´ of a significant amount of the 'hard' theory of project management and to embrace a more constructivist / systemic approach to my practice. This different approach to my practice draws on four themes. Firstly, it utilises Soft Systems Methodology (Checkland 1981, 2000, Checkland & Scholes, 1990, Checkland & Poulter, 2006 & Wilson 1984) to develop a holistic understanding of my educational practice as a 'problem situation' that involves a plurality of actors and different *Weltanschauung* (world-views). Secondly, it uses an action learning pedagogy to position experiential educational encounters as an active and dynamic process. This perspective is informed by the theories of Argyris & Schön (1978), Schön (1983, 1987), Argyris (1991) and Kolb (1984). Thirdly, it draws on the work of Dewey (1910, 2007), Johns (2004, 2009), Moon (2004) and Brookfield (1995, 2002) to consider the role of reflective practice as a learning strategy that translates an experience into a highly personal learning process. The fourth and final strand looks at my teaching as a systemic practice that values the connectedness of experiences, the relationships of the participants and the quality of the communications (Bateson 1972, 1979, Barge, 2004, 2007). Drawing these themes together through my living inquiry (Marshall, 2001) I have seen my practice develop from being a conveyor of the cold theory of project management into someone who co-constructs educational experiences.

The second episode took place nine years later during the summer of 2011. A colleague dropped into my office to see if I knew 'the news'. The MSc in Project Management was to be laid down as an independent programme in favour of a project management pathway on the general MSc in Management. Whilst the logic of the potential economic benefit from running 'common' courses for a range of programmes was powerful, the thought that I would be slipping back to the days of the *Dementors* was frightening. However, the energy that this decision created gave life to this thesis as I saw it as a way to investigate my practice and make a clear statement of what I believe in and why I do so.

1.4 The Research Questions

This account of my professional practice is focussed on two key research questions.

The first strand to my inquiry examines my living theory for professional practice. In this inquiry I am seeking to understand the relevance that the foundations of my practice are making to the education of the students on the MSc Project Management. This inquiry will allow me to be more conscious of my practice and to develop this for the benefit of future generations of students. The research question that frames this inquiry is:

> **Research Question 1:** How do I as an educator draw upon the practices of systems and systemic thinking, action learning and reflective practice in order to create meaningful educational environments for project managers?

Furthermore, my inquiry will become more purposeful when I ground it in the context that the students seek to enter after their studies are completed. Therefore I will breathe energy into this through an exploration of the actuality of project management practice as experienced by both course students and the practising alumni of the course.

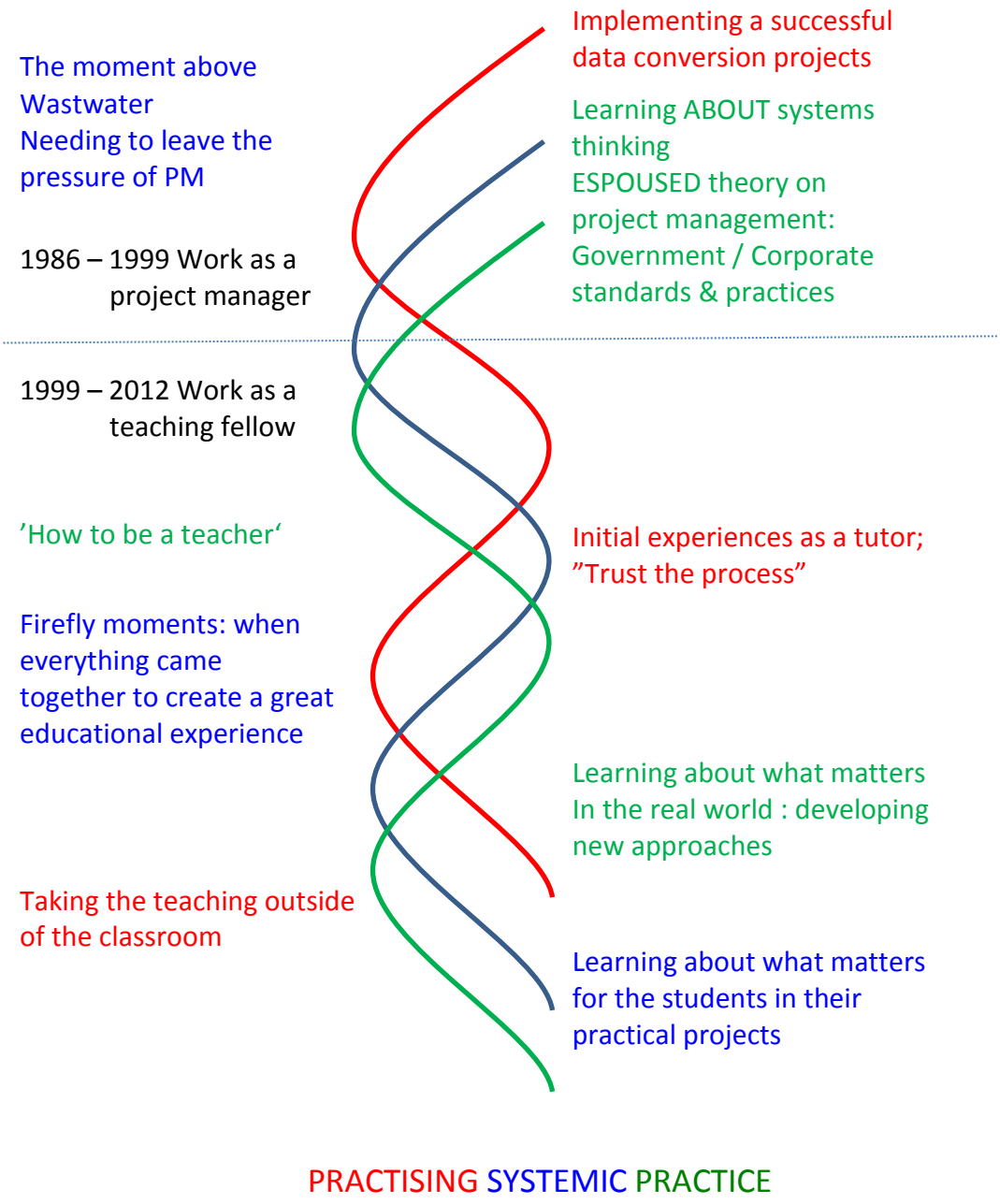
The research question that frames the contextual aspects of my inquiry is:

> **Research Question 2:** What is it that project managers recognise as being the critical moments of their practice and how does their lived experience inform my future practice as a teacher?

This question allows me to understand more fully the “difference that makes the difference” (Bateson 1972, 1979) to both the students and the post qualification alumni professional practice. By understanding these firefly moments more fully I can link back into my living inquiry to make the content, process and context of the course and my teaching richer for future students.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

In writing up my living inquiry I appreciated more fully that “I am part of the problem and the problem is part of me” (Thorpe et al, 2009 p.204). Rather than seeing a neatly segregated thesis with an appraisal of theory, identification of key questions, enrolment of external research population and application of a rigorous method, I saw a rich tapestry where ‘practice’, ‘theory’ and ‘reflection’ are wrapped around each other in a triple helix as illustrated in Figure 4, overleaf.



Key:
Red = practical episodes
Green = theoretical episodes
Blue = reflective episodes

Figure 4: The triple helix effect
Source: author

The origin of the triple helix was my consideration of how I had successfully entered management education 'by accident'. I could not find the answer in my academic strength as I had not taken a research degree in the field of project management. Nor could I see the answer lying in my expertise in the practice of project management. It was through this reflection a realisation of the criticality of the synthesis of my professional practice, combined with systemic grounding and my reflective practice, emerged. In the language of Soft Systems Methodology (Checkland 1981, 2000; Checkland & Scholes, 1990, Checkland & Poulter, 2006) my professional practice is an 'emergent property' of these individual threads.

To convey my learning, I have enrolled a narrative structure called the Hero's Journey (Campbell, 1988). Campbell defines a common thread (a monomyth) that is drawn from his analysis of stories and myths from across the world. This monomyth is comprised of a number of common stages including 'a call to adventure', 'helpers and amulets', 'crossing the threshold', 'tests', 'climax', 'return' and finally 'elixir' (see Figure 5, overleaf). These seven headings introduce the relevant chapters of this thesis. In choosing this style I am conscious of the benefit of creating a narrative structure that is descriptive but also wary of the potential pitfalls of using it either as a prescriptive device or one that distorts my account. By this I mean that I have had to escape the constraints of either believing I must find an aspect of my experience called 'flight' or changing the dynamics of my experience in a way that aligns to the cycle but misrepresents my journey.

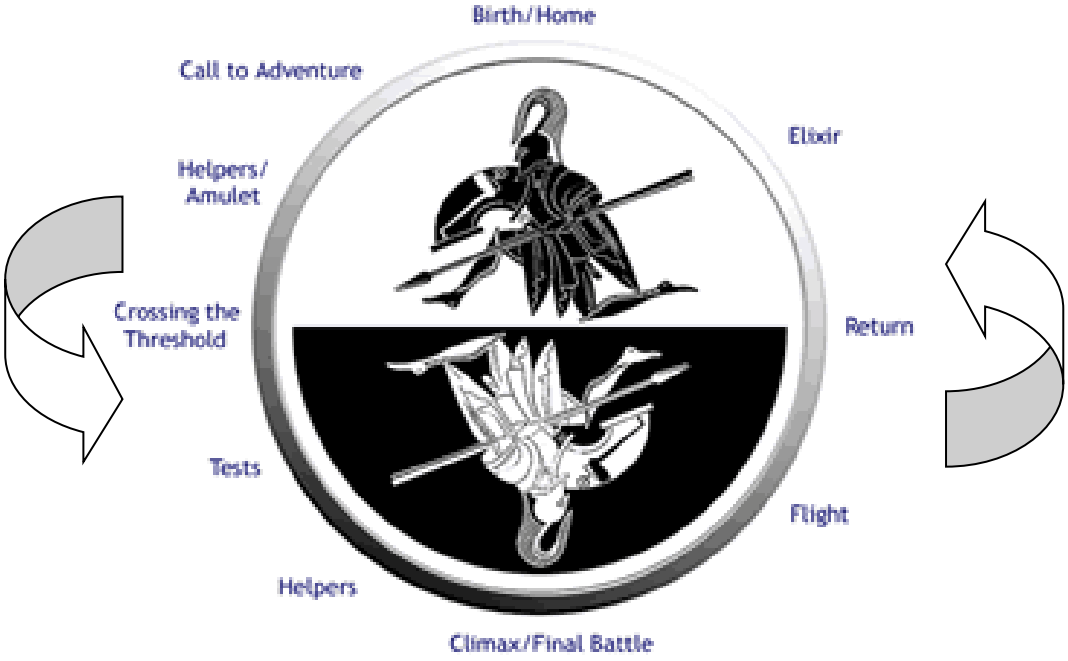


Figure 5: The Hero's Journey
Source: http://astoriedcareer.com/monomyth.gif[1].

The stages that appear most relevant to me as I seek to understand my practice are as follows:

In the **'Call to Adventure'** (Chapter 1) I have introduced myself and provided some insight into my experiences. This is supported by Appendix 2 which provides further insight into my world as an educator.

In the early stages of my educational career I relied on the assistance and guidance from a number of **'Helpers / Amulets'.** Chapter 2 examines the influence that the project management community and colleagues in the PDU had on my early development.

'Crossing the Threshold' is expressed through the '*Dementor*' moment (p.8). This tipping point was the moment where I would have to choose between a different

[1] This figure of the Greek warrior journey in the representation of the hero's journey is a nod to my intellectual development as a graduate in Ancient History

way of being or a different context for being. This chapter provides an account of the research methods I used to resolve this dilemma and create a new sustainable way of working.

In Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7, I develop my personal understanding of key perspectives that have served as **'The Helpers'** during my journey. In these chapters, I will examine why I do what I do in the fields of systems thinking, action learning, reflective practice and systemic practice. These chapters cover a critique of literature associated with these areas of practice and push through into an account of how I engage with the literature while teaching on the MSc in Project Management. In doing this I am seeking to share my living theory that informs my practice.

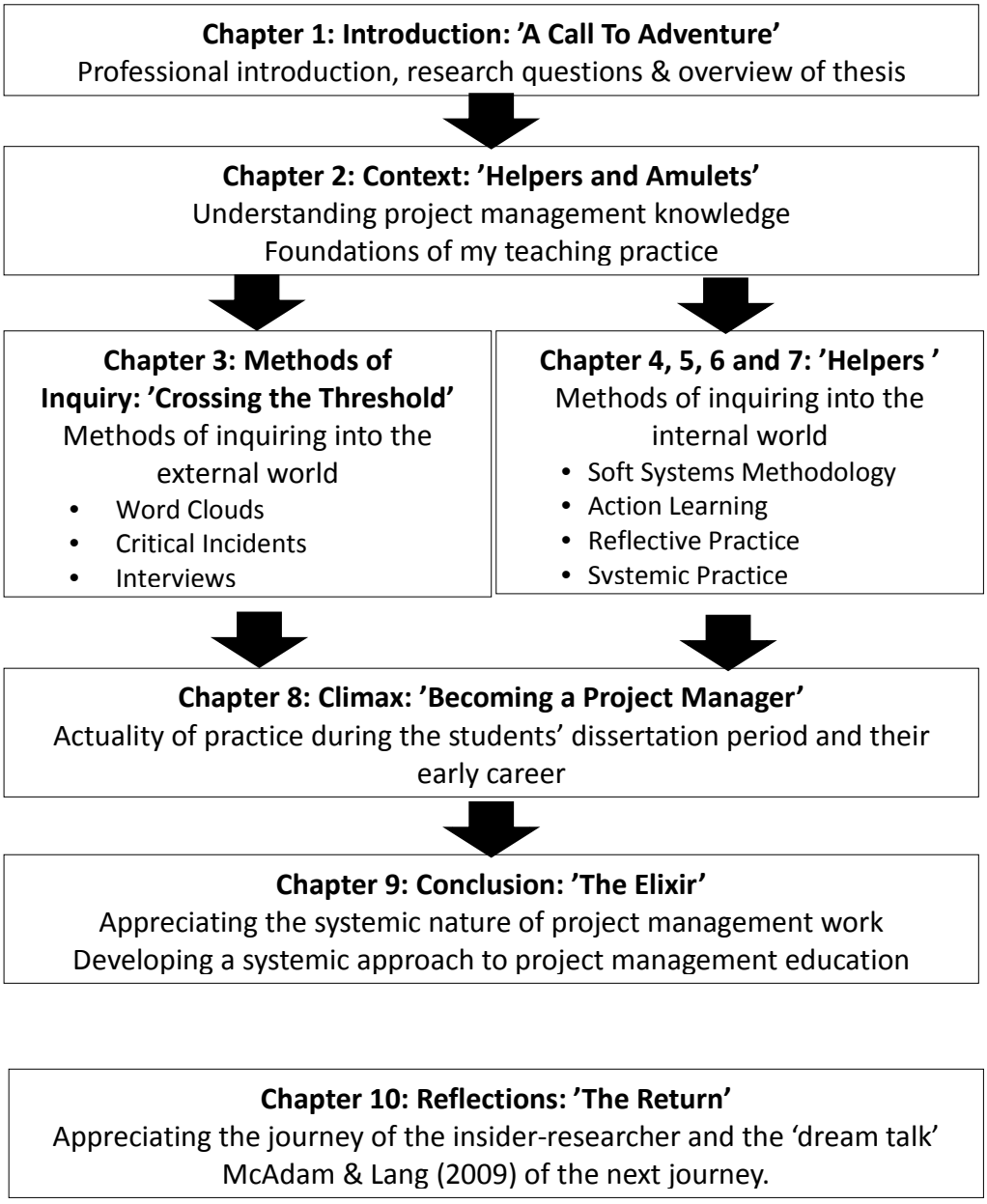
In the **'The Climax'** (Chapter 8) I explore how the students on the MSc in Project Management are conveying and understanding the actuality of their practice. By examining their dissertations, as well as interviewing a number of alumni, I have sought to understand more fully what it takes and what it means to be a project manager. This knowledge is a compass for my practice as it serves as both a guide and validation of the experiences I seek to co-create with future generations of students.

Drawing the findings of the primary research (Chapter 8) together with the inquiry into my living theory (Chapters 4, 5, 6 & 7) I address the research questions and provide a conclusion to this thesis. **'The Elixir'** (Chapter 9) also discusses the implications for my practice and demonstrates how these findings could inform other practitioners on their journeys.

In **'The Return'** I reflect back on the journey of the researcher and consider how my personal journey will continue. I focus on the key insights I have had as an insider-researcher and the 'dream talk' (McAdam & Lang, 2009) for my future

research practice. In naming this section ‘The Return’ whilst reflecting and learning for the future I am conscious of the on-going nature of my journey rather than seeing this thesis as the end point. I am also consciously placing this section after ‘The Elixir’ aware that this is deviating from the traditional cycle but also that these are concurrent processes that have been harnessed by the thesis structure.

This structure is summarised in Figure 6, overleaf.

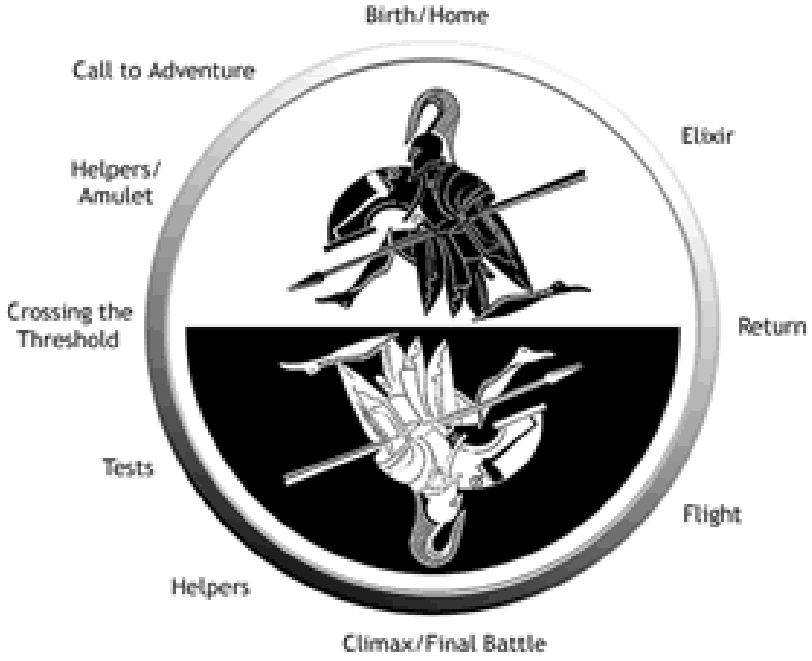


Chapter 10: Reflections: 'The Return'
Appreciating the journey of the insider-researcher and the 'dream talk' McAdam & Lang (2009) of the next journey.

Figure 6: Schematic of the Thesis
Source: author

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXT: "HELPERS AND AMULETS"



2. CONTEXT: "HELPERS AND AMULETS"

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 introduces the thesis and provides a brief overview of my career before entering Lancaster University as a teaching fellow. In this chapter I will explore two distinct elements of my early career. Firstly, I will recall my induction into the department's tradition of Reflective Practice. Secondly, I will examine my appreciation of the academic traditions and conventions of project management.

Within the narrative structure of this thesis this chapter is termed the "Helpers and Amulets". The notion of an Amulet as a talisman that protects the person from evil is a relevant one in this context as I sought to protect myself from internal and external challenges through the acquisition of 'better' knowledge.

As well as providing a context to the rest of the thesis my consideration of the formative phase of an 'accidental' career will be a sounding board to the subsequent development of my practice.

2.2 "Trust the Process"

When I joined the University I was an intuitive practitioner in project management. I had worked for over ten years in three different companies as a project manager / change agent and had a wealth of scars, and a few plaques on the wall, to testify to this experience. Yet I had never consciously engaged in either formal academic study on the subject nor had I undertaken a conscious process of reflective practice on my experience. Consequently I was full of

curiosity when I approached the domain of project management and the department's pedagogy of action learning and reflection.

This pedagogy was at the heart of the department and everything flowed from this practice. Formal didactic lectures were replaced by experiential exercises. The underlying assessment looked at the rigour of the process of inquiry and the developmental insights offered through reflection rather than the formal product of group exercises. The tutors acted as guides rather than instructors, one of our key roles was being facilitators of action learning set groups. When my curiosity prompted me to question how best to support this engagement I was confidently told that I should "*Trust the Process"*. At the time no one articulated *what* the process was, just that I should *trust* it.

Looking back at what I thought the process was I have identified the explicit characteristics as being firstly, that the individual is the agent of change whilst at the same time being the primary subject of inquiry. Secondly, that this inquiry is based upon personal experience and thirdly, that the process should lead to a more skilful practice in the future. It was with this concise account of the process that I entered the world of action learning and reflective practice.

The light touch of this process was one of the strengths of the amulet. There was no prescriptive right way. Each individual could approach this practice with their own humanity, their own aspirations for the future together with their own way of reaching out to this future. However, it also felt as if the students were forced to find their way along an unmarked beach. Whilst the length of the stride, the pressure of the step, the speed and direction of travel was theirs and theirs alone they could not benefit from seeing the tracks others have made (Figure 7, below). In my early days I did not fully appreciate the subtlety of the process and felt as if it was one that allowed some to flourish but many more to struggle with the concept and the practicalities entailed.

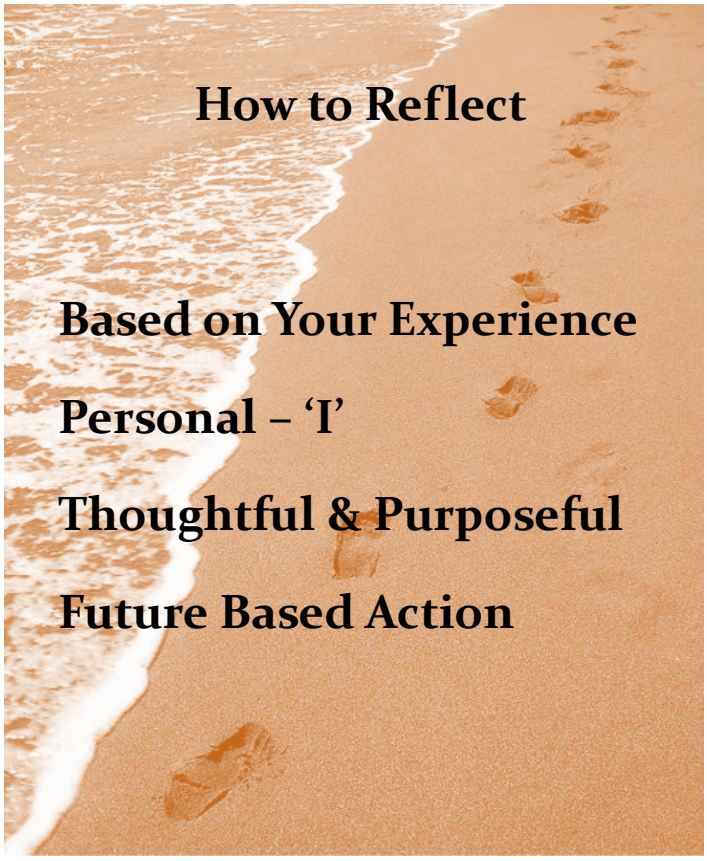


Figure 7: The Footprints in the Sand (a guide to the process of reflection)
Source: author

My approach to this tension was to create a representation of the process, to objectify its subtlety and to commodify it through a description of the steps that should be taken and the pressure that should be applied (see Appendix 3). This document articulates four key steps (i.e. Description, Recognition, Analysis and Synthesis) and is still used by the department ten years on. However, now I find it is clumsy and restrictive. Perhaps this uneasy feeling is due to three key factors. Firstly, the nature of the development of my understanding about the process of reflection. Secondly, a concern that a subtle practice will lose something if it is commodified through the creation of an 'x' step approach. And thirdly, the way in which this document may be counterproductive by replacing curiosity and the need to enter a dialogical process with a prescriptive menu in order to achieve a successful outcome. However, I am moving ahead of myself. At the time of writing and in the following years of my practice I believed it was a useful amulet.

2.3 Talking With the World of Project Management

The codification of the aforementioned key steps provided me with a belief that I understood the departmental learning processes. Whilst I was developing this appreciation I also explored the formal (academic) world of project management.

In this section I will define project management and then go on to provide an overview of three key debates within the project management literature. These are firstly, the role of the professional bodies in defining the knowledge required to be a project manager. Secondly, the development of academic perspectives on project management and thirdly, the implications of these perspectives on the art of teaching project management

2.3.1 The Development of Project Management

The explicit discipline of project management is generally considered to have developed out of the hard operational research initiatives of the post-war era. Maylor (2010) describes three generations of project management practice. The 'first generation', 1950s through to 1980s, was born out of construction and engineering practice. This practice was spread in the 1980s and 1990s into a 'second generation' that saw professionalisation and adoption by a wider range of organisations. Whilst the concepts were applied to general business problems the roots of the practice remained in the engineering tradition with its rationalistic agenda expressed through the 'iron triangle' of time, cost and quality. The dominance of this perspective on project management is illustrated by the prevalence of rationalistic definitions of what constitutes a project. An example of this perspective is provided by the British Standards Institute who define a project as:

> A unique set of co-ordinated activities, with definite starting and finishing points, undertaken by an individual or organization to meet specific objectives within defined schedule, cost and performance parameters.
>
> (British Standards Institute 2000 p. 2)

Maylor asserts that the 'third generation' (1990s onwards) has seen project management move beyond this definition to emerge as a strategy for delivering business success. He sees the practice of project managers reaching beyond the boundaries of the engineering discipline and tentatively incorporating the humanistic as well as technocratic paradigms. However, the limitations of this broader canvas are still to be seen in many third generation definitions. For example Turner (2009) recalls how he once defined a project as:

> An endeavour in which human, material and financial resources are organized in a novel way, to undertake a unique scope of work, of given specification, within constraints of cost and time, so as to achieve beneficial change defined by quantitative and qualitative objectives.
>
> (Turner 2009 p. 2)

The tragedy of project management is that its claim of relevance to a world in transition is undermined by its limited appreciation of the scope of its work. For example, Turner et al (2010 p.1) assert that between one fifth and one third of global GDP ($10 -16 trillion) is spent on projects. Yet, their definition of projects is stuck in a narrow perception as a "temporary organisation to which resources are assigned" (ibid p. 14). Likewise the Project Management Institute promotes itself as "one of the largest professional membership associations in the world" (PMI no date) yet

provides an impoverished definition of a project as “a temporary endeavour undertaken to create a unique product, service or result” (2004 p.5).

There are richer appreciations of the nuances and complexities of project management afforded by authors associated with the third generation. Atkinson (1999) contested the view that project success is best articulated through the ‘iron triangle’, arguing for a more systemic appreciation. Atkinson’s revised definition of success takes into account a broader range of stakeholders’ interests over a longer temporal span (i.e. focussing on the project success as well as the project management success). More recent work by Hodgson & Cicmil (2006), Hodgson (2002, 2004, 2007), and Söderlund (2005) continues to develop critical and social constructivist appreciation of project management. However, when I first entered the profession, at the time when I was seeking my amulets, Atkinson’s (1999) voice was that of a pioneer opening up a new world.

2.3.2 Gaining Entry through the Bodies of Knowledge

In my initial quest to understand the world of project management I engaged in the key theories and debates that surround the profession. Initially this engagement was looking at the functional knowledge on the various tools and techniques that form part of the project management toolkit. However, as my practice started to cover full-time students in the Management School, (following the restructuring the department was relocated from the Engineering Department to the Management School) I sought to develop this practical knowledge with a more considered theoretical approach to the world of project management.

I believed that the knowledge of this world would 'protect' me. At one level I sought to use the formal knowledge of the subject as a defence against students who voiced a concern about the relevance of the tools. I could rebut their challenge and claim legitimacy by asserting that it was part of the professional bodies' Body of Knowledge. At another level I could attempt to use these theories to parry challenges from colleagues in the Management School who regard project management as a fragmented discipline lacking theoretical underpinnings (e.g. Turner 2005, 2009, Kwak & Anbari, 2009). A third level where I used this theory as a defence was against myself and my identity as an educator. By immersing myself in the academic accounts of project management practice I believed that I had a legitimate place within the Management School and a 'right' to be teaching project management to a broad range of students.

My initial appreciation of this knowledge was through the work of the professional associations, specifically the Association for Project Management (APM) and the Project Management Institute (PMI) who had each documented their own Body of Knowledge. The perspectives that these two bodies adopt are slightly different. The PMI provides one that is constrained by five core processes, namely: initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling & closing, together with nine knowledge areas (see Figure 8, overleaf).

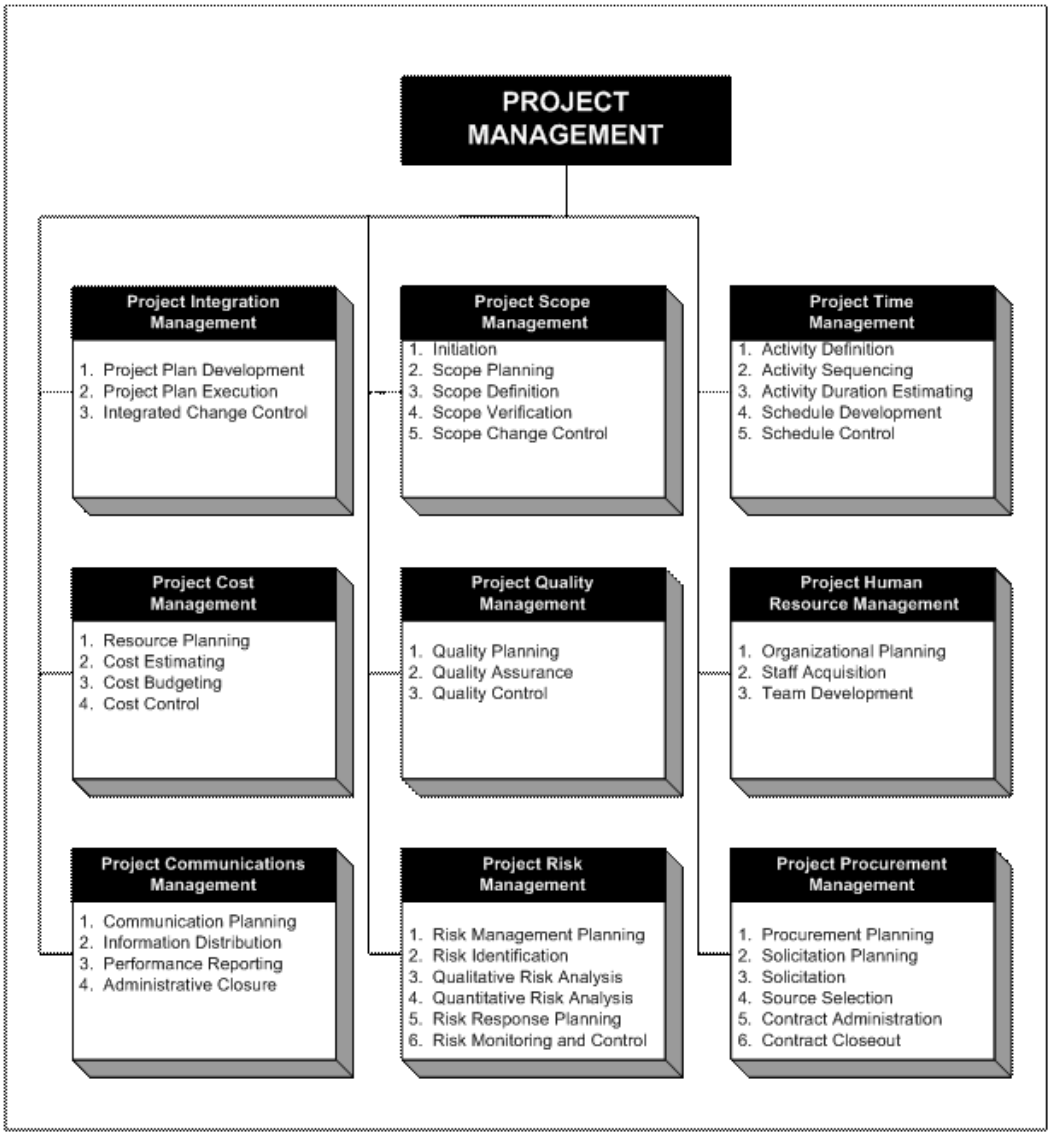


Figure 8: Project Management Knowledge Areas (PMI)
PMI (2004 p. 11)

In contrast to this functional approach the APM approach looks at areas of interest and explores at different levels of granularity (i.e. only a few specific techniques are drawn into focus), see Figure 9 overleaf.

Figure 9: Body of Knowledge Topics (APM)
Source: APM (2006b p.5)

In considering the different approaches I looked at the aspirations of the authors and publishing bodies. Duncan (1996 cited in Morris et al 2000) defined the role of the PMI Body of Knowledge as being the *sum* of knowledge relevant to project management that practitioners should be knowledgeable on (Morris et al 2000). Perhaps such a grandiose claim is

illustrative of the positivistic roots of the profession. My appreciation of them was less assured. Rather than seeing the Body of Knowledge as the definitive account, or even a road map for success I viewed it as being more akin to a compass. As such it could generally point the practitioner in the right direction but not account for the contours in the landscape that would disrupt the progress to the desired end-point.

The role and value of these Bodies of Knowledge are contested by various commentators. Eraut (1994, p.165) focuses on their legitimacy as a disciplining mechanism which occupies (and defends) an intellectual base camp for the exclusive uses of a specified area of professional practice. Carbone & Gholston (2004) develop this appreciation by asserting that they are pivotal for development of a new generation of project managers and assert that academic courses should be aligned with them. However, in contrast Brill et al (2006) see them as being at best constraining blinkers, and more likely as inadequate models of project management that are likely to confuse rather than assist practitioners (Brill et al 2006, p.118).

A further criticism is that they lack the theoretical underpinning that would ground them in an academic discourse. In the next section I will develop this exploration of a fledgling practice seeking to root itself in a legitimising discourse.

2.3.3 Developing a Theoretical Basis for Project Management

The Bodies of Knowledge have been supplemented by academic research on the subject of project management. However, the endeavours to develop an academic discourse are disrupted by an underlying tension, namely, what academic discipline acts as the ontological foundation? The quest to define this has resulted in the spawning of an industry dedicated to proving, or contesting, the legitimacy of project management as a profession (e.g. Turner 2005, 2009 Kwak & Anbari, 2009, Jugdev 2004, Betts & Lansley 1995, Kloppenborg & Opfer 2002, Morris 2003 and Shenhar & Dvir 1996).

Betts & Lansley's (1995) analysis of the development of project management knowledge identifies a breadth of topics included in the seminal journal, *the International Journal of Project Management*. The subject content of the papers peaked in the areas of "human factors", "project organisation", "project planning" and the "project environment". However, whilst there is a wide breadth of topic coverage, the arena of practice is more constrained. Fifty four percent of the papers were focussed on the construction industry which was four times greater than any of the other engineering focussed sectors. Sixty one percent of the papers claimed an "insight" rather than, for example, "theory building" on the project management process. They go on to conclude that the main thrust of this journal is one that "seeks to improve understanding by presenting sound information, insightful reviews and good management practice rather than highly abstract models" (ibid p.215). This focus on the "insight" research was also identified by Leybourne (2007), Morris (2003) and Shenhar & Dvir (1996).

Betts & Lansley's analysis was confined to a single journal. A wider analysis was undertaken by Kloppenborg & Opger (2002), who demonstrated a growth in interest in the subject over four decades. This growth is seen across all subject areas and also arenas of practice. Kloppenborg & Opger (2002) assert that the 1970s saw a focus on cost and schedule control, performance measurement, life cycle management and the importance of a specific tool (the work breakdown structure). In the 1980s the focus remained on project life cycle management which, by this time, had embraced life-cycle costing and design-to-cost approaches. In addition, project risk management and cost schedule / control systems (Earned Value) research featured strongly whilst the topics of team and quality management also emerged as significant research themes. They conclude by asserting that the 1990s was a decade focussed on human resource management, leadership development and motivational research. This demonstrates a laying down of epistemes of knowledge over the past four decades (Foucault, 1980). This journey encompassed an initial focus on technical tools to support timely delivery, through to a focus on delivery within cost constraints (life cycle costing / Earned Value) before moving into the integrative processes of project leadership. However, whilst what constituted appropriate knowledge was broadened, the arenas of practice were still focussed on construction and information systems.

The implications of this narrow focus of research is highlighted by Crawford et al (2005). They question the validity of claims about a universal theory of project management based on an analysis of a thin slice of practice, by citing Evaristo & Van Fenema (1999) who state that "the current knowledge based on the management of projects emanates from large capital construction projects responsible for only 10% of [all of] the projects" (p.276 cited in Crawford et al 2005 p. 175). Could we claim to understand the nature of the earth's atmosphere by an analysis of oxygen?

In a similar way will we have a fragmented, disproportionate and potentially damaging appreciation of project management if we have a blinkered perspective on research? The potential damaging nature of this research agenda is magnified if we seek to use it to codify professional practice (through the Bodies of Knowledge) and discipline its practitioners with this mantra.

Whilst Betts & Lansley (1995), Kloppenborg & Opger (2002) and Crawford et al (2005) have all highlighted the limitations of project management research, Leybourne (2007) has sought to identify where the gaps in knowledge could be filled and documents an evolution of the project management literature (see Figure 10, below) which focuses on the transition of the field from an engineering discipline into a more mainstream management discipline.

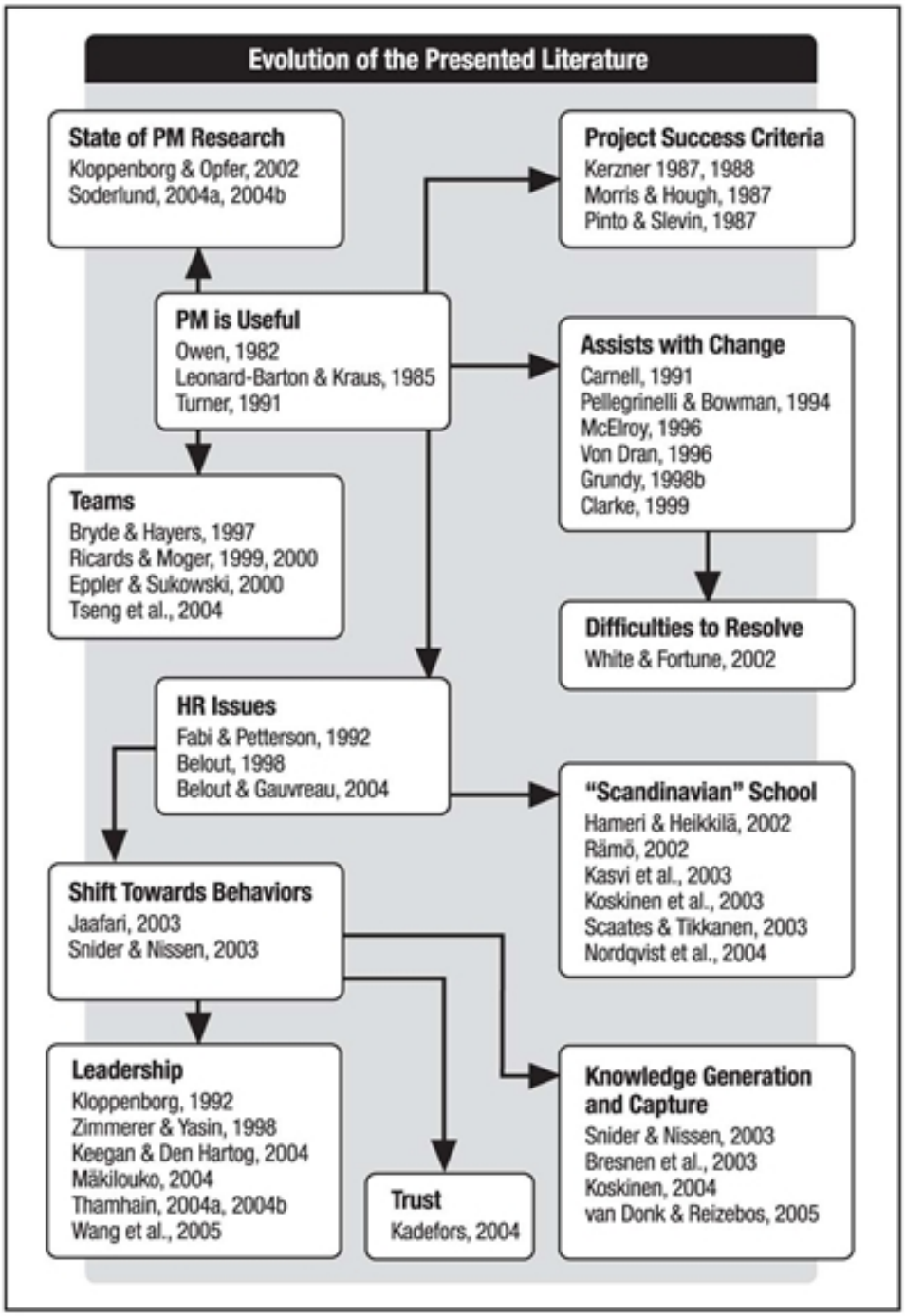


Figure 10: Evolution of Elements of Project Management Literature
Source: Leybourne (2007, p. 63)

Leybourne (2007) asserts that a mechanistic research agenda driven by practitioner based journals has resulted in a gap between the theories of project management and the extant theories of management (p. 65). To demonstrate some of the lost synergies and to promote debate about the

inter-connectedness of project management and (general) management Leybourne (2007) overlays some key management theories onto a general project lifecycle model (Adams & Barndt's 1988) (see Figure 11, overleaf).

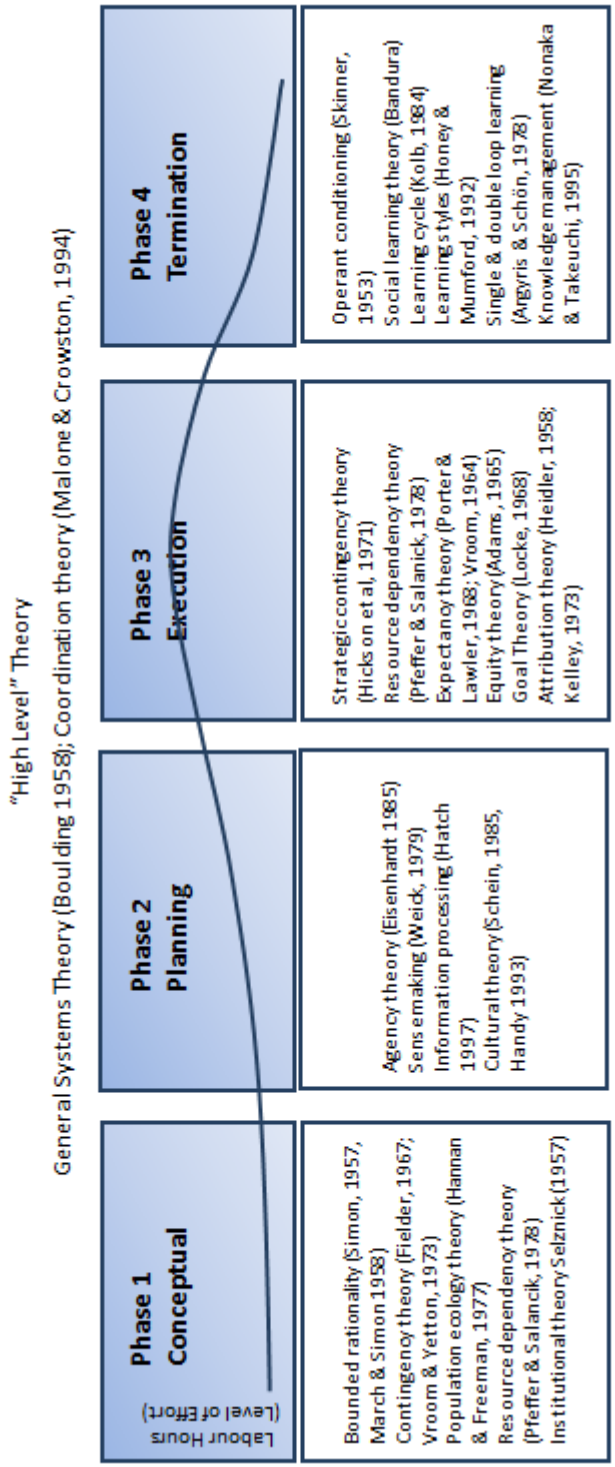


Figure 11; Project Life Cycle with Supporting Theory
Source: Adapted from Leybourne (2007, p. 66)

Leybourne's (2007) account of disconnects and potential synergies between project management theory and general management theory illustrate a dilemma I experienced in my search for an appropriate amulet. Although it was published eight years after I entered the profession, it was still talking about a blinkered profession that strives to underpin what is essentially a social practice with a technocratic theory derived from a fraction of the experiences which make up the project environment as a whole.

More recently this research agenda has been pursued by an Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (ESPRC) research network 'Rethinking Project Management'. At the heart of this project was a challenge to overturn a positivist ontology that saw projects as being "something definite and obvious" (Maylor 2006 p.635). The key research agendas that emerged out of this project included the positioning of projects as social processes, rather than instrumental linear processes focussed on the lifecycle. There was also the recognition of fuzzy project management that is, projects with ill-defined starting points and a multiplicity of agents, motivations and outcomes, and the development of reflective practitioners rather than trained technicians (Winter & Smith, 2006).

The work of the ESPRC network was developed by Turner et al (2010) and Winter & Szczepanek (2009). Whilst each of these works sought to take a broader view on the world of project management, they have approached it from different (but complementary) perspectives. Turner et al (2010) seek to ground the actuality of projects in nine intellectual schools, for example the science of optimisation and contingent theory. As such, the authors are seeking, in a similar way to Leybourne (2007), to ground project management research within a broader tradition of management

research. Complementary to this is the work of Winter & Szczepanek (2009) who provide seven sense-making lenses to understand the broad social processes at work within the entities we collectively call 'projects'. This approach seeks to challenge society's appreciation of projects as uncontested, rational objects capable of being accurately described through a linear lifecycle (as shown in Figure 12, below) to a more problematic endeavour requiring a multiplicity of perspectives in order to gain the necessary insights to step into the flux and undertake a purposeful change process (as shown in Figure 13, below).

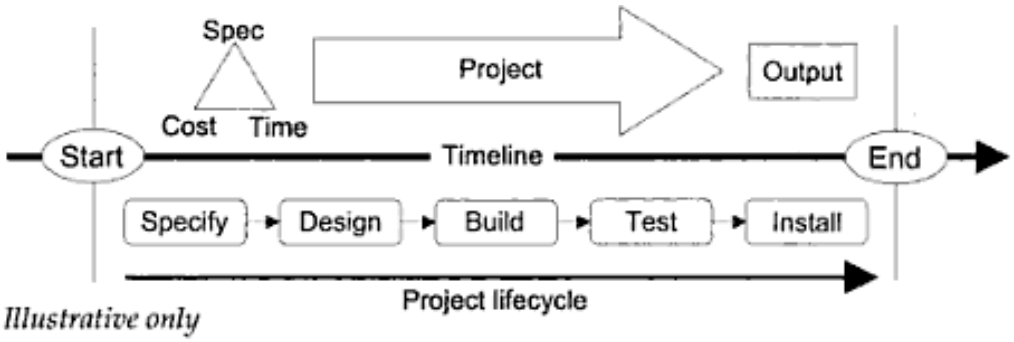


Figure 12; Traditional Project Management Lifecycle
Source: Winter & Szczepanek (2009 p. 4)

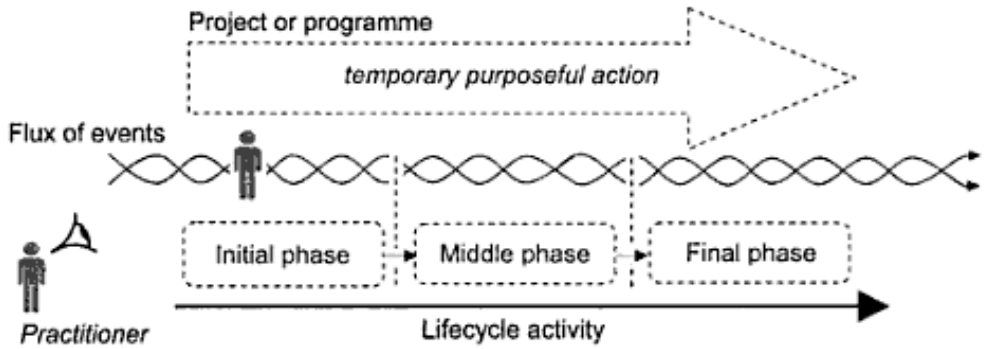


Figure 13; Winter & Szczepanek's Representation of a Project Management Lifecycle
Source: Winter & Szczepanek (2009 p. 7)

Winter & Szczepanek's (2009) visualisation of projects through the lenses of "social", "political", "intervention", "value creation", "development" and "change processes" as well as through the lens of "temporary organisations" provide a broad constructionist appreciation of projects. At the core of their treatment is the concept that projects are co-created through the social interaction between the client, project manager and key stakeholders. This representation of a contested project entity is a considerable distance away from the binary either/or, world directed by the Bodies of Knowledge.

2.4 Appreciating Project Management Education

The previous sections consider the roles of the Bodies of Knowledge and the academic research agenda in the creation of the content of my teaching practice. The notion of a positivistic tradition to project management has been established and the relevance of this has been questioned. In this section I will reflect on my teaching practice and how I have embraced my amulet. This treatment will be structured through Wirth's (1992) typology of the components of project management.

Wirth (1992) separated project management knowledge into three components. Firstly, generic core management knowledge, secondly, a toolkit with specific project management approaches and thirdly, an arena for application which explores the organisational and cultural context. In Wirth's conceptualisation of the generic core knowledge he included a wider appreciation of the issues and challenges of management and the prevailing theoretical basis for management practice, for example organisational behaviour theory and financial management practice. These roots of management practice create the foundation for specific project management practices as espoused in the toolkit. Drawing on the professional Bodies of Knowledge as well as other industry practices the toolkit

aims to provide a systematic approach to initiating, planning and executing a project. As such the specific project management practices such as work identification (work breakdown structures), estimating and resource allocation are covered in a manner that would allow the student to apply these to a range of projects and project scenarios. The third aspect of Wirth's (1992) typology is one that considers application areas. This seeks to identify 'best practice' for a specific sector of application such as the defence industry, or telecommunications and to use this as the sense-making process for generic real world applications. An alternative interpretation of the importance of context is seen when we turn this model on its head and draw our understanding of an appropriate theoretical basis directly from the actuality of situated experience rather than it being conditioned through the prescription of 'best practice', that is to use for example an action learning pedagogy to derive insightful practice.

Wirth (1992) argues that these three components can each be considered from three separate perspectives, namely, a functional, lifecycle or integrative perspective (see Figure 14, overleaf). Firstly, the functional representation of knowledge, like human resources management or cost management, places an emphasis on the manner in which organisations are structured into silos of professional knowledge. This functional structure is at the heart of the contemporary conceptualisation of management with its emphasis on rational behaviour and efficiencies. Wirth's second perspective focuses on the project lifecycle. This worldview embraces an account of a project's linear temporal flow from initiation to completion. Such a perspective can be clearly seen in the rich variety of 'waterfall' models of project management which see one process starting after the timely completion of its predecessors. Finally, Wirth's third perspective is one that values the integrative work of project management. This third perspective articulates the importance of teamwork and views the project manager as a boundary spanner. To be successful in this role the project manager needs to be able to build temporary coalitions with diverse

communities of stakeholders and diverse forms of knowledge. Consequently this perspective is rich in the appreciation of stakeholder engagement, motivation, negotiation and leadership skills (Wirth 1992).

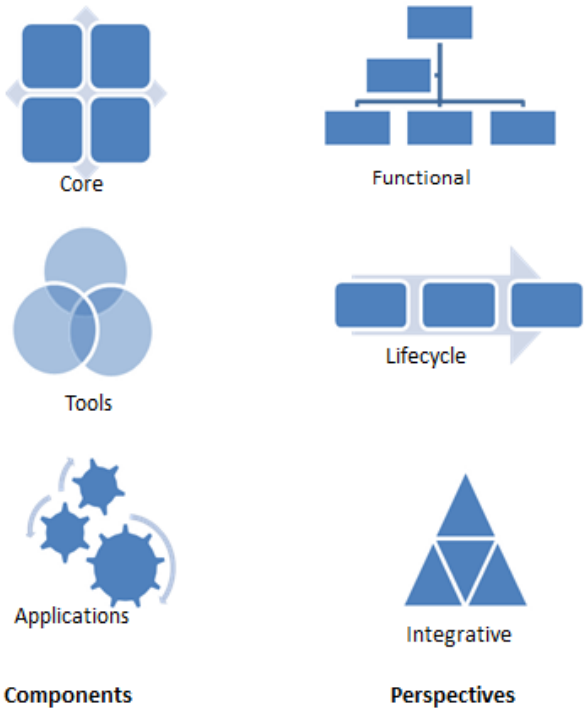


Figure 14: Components and Perspectives of Project Management Education
Source: Wirth (1992)

Wirth's (1992) framework helps me to understand and communicate a variety of approaches to project management, and project management education, that I have used in my career. To illustrate how I use this to develop my practice I will offer three different scenarios. The first scenario (see Figure 15) is a toolkit based approach to project management which focuses on a variety of techniques to overcome the challenges of projects, typically defining the work required, allocating resources to this work or managing the risks. Such a pedagogical approach provides an easy to access toolkit and one that offers a rational framework for action. The limitations of this approach may be seen as the toolkit

is applied to real world situations that refuse to conform to the assumptions embedded in the tools, for example that the work is known, that the actors will play their parts according to the script or that the project will follow the prescribed waterfall model.

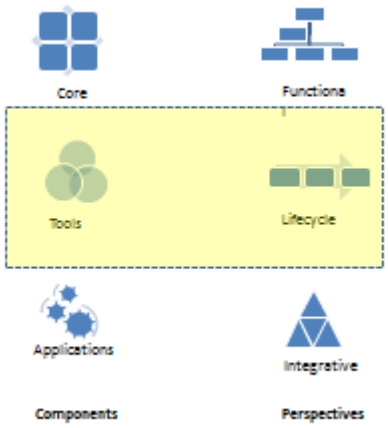


Figure 15: Illustration of a Toolkit Approach to Project Management Education

The second scenario (see Figure 16, overleaf) is a 'top down' rationalist perspective of project management. In this context the course is grounded in the ontology of scientific management and produces an approach to project management that is centred on the critical functions, structures and accountabilities, namely strategic governance levels, contractual frameworks, business cases and work allocations. This appreciation of project strategy and organisation would then be cascaded through to an appreciation of the legitimate lifecycle framework and a prescribed toolkit. In this model of project management education, project management is focussed on 'time, cost and quality' together with the discipline of project management, and this would be presented as 'best practice' that must be applied to a wide variety of contexts. From this common grounding in the discipline of project management the individual or localised learning, by students relating to their current or future practice, is left outside of the formal pedagogy and largely left to chance.

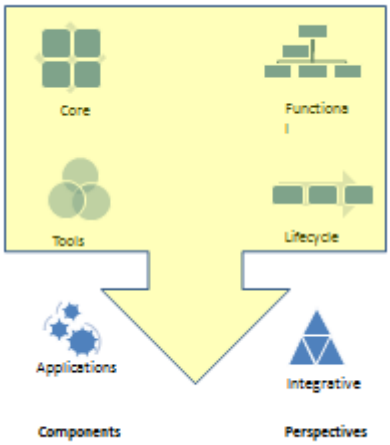


Figure 16: Illustration of a Rationalistic (Top Down) Approach to Project Management Education

The third 'experiential' scenario (see Figure 17, overleaf) starts at the level of students' experiences in a project. Here a real world project is presented to (or by) the students. This experience of the complexities of project management would allow for a contextualised unveiling of possible approaches to solving emerging issues for real and in real time. Consequently the project may give rise to learning at the toolkit, lifecycle and structures level. The nature of this learning is deeply rooted in the experience of the project. As such, there is no guarantee that the project would reveal learning opportunities for a prescribed set of learning outcomes.

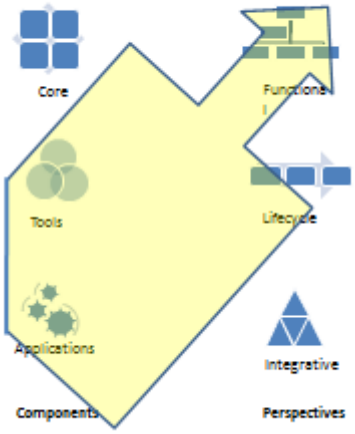


Figure 17: Illustration of an Experiential Approach to Project Management Education

A fourth approach (see Figure 18, overleaf) to project management education sees education as an integrative encounter. Here the blend of directive knowledge acquisition, emergent contextualised learning and critique of existing paradigms may be balanced over a series of projects, or learning cycles. These learning cycles may be structured to start at relatively simple and constrained endeavours that can be mapped and managed through the application of the 'standard' toolkit before the reins are loosened to bring in more dynamism and real world complexity.

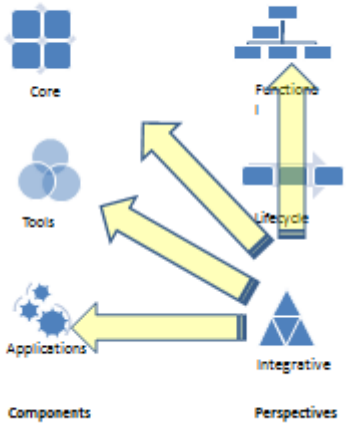


Figure 18: Illustration of an Integrated Approach to Project Management Education

In considering my practice over the last ten years I can see that I have employed each of the approaches identified above. There are occasions where I have been drawn into a degree programme to deliver a tools and techniques module with little connection between this and the core elements of the programme. This lack of connection was part of the problem situation identified in the *Dementors* moment (the tipping point) previously described.

In contrast to the tipping point, my early career was focussed on the experiential model where the students paid attention to their sense-making of the challenges presented by live projects.

Having Wirth's (1992) framework to hand has helped me to quickly appreciate and communicate some of the challenges presented in the various course / module designs that I have been introduced to. It has also allowed me to develop the students' appreciation of the content and pedagogy of the courses we have shared.

2.5 Conclusion:

In this chapter I have provided an account of the foundations to my practice. I have described how upon entering the world of education I was introduced to an action learning / reflective practice process. My response to this was to attempt to commodify an intuitive process through explicit instructions.

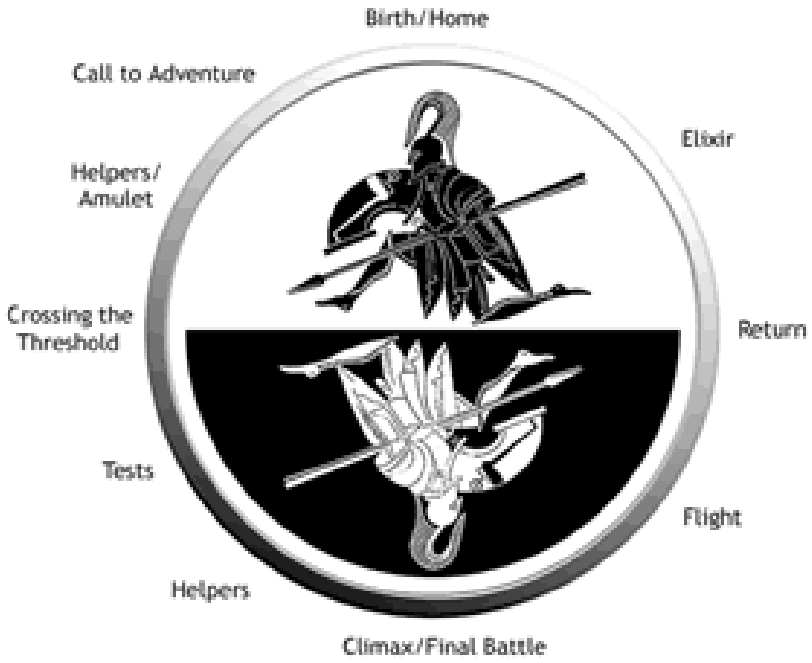
This search for an amulet to protect me in the early days of my career was mirrored in my quest to understand the accidental profession of project management. A difference between this exploration, and the exploration of the department's pedagogy, was that I did locate an explicit account of what it means to be a project management educator encoded in the Bodies of Knowledge. However, the effectiveness of this quest to understand project management was hindered by the limited and constraining appreciation that these artefacts of knowledge had of the actuality of project management practice.

This quest to be a 'proper' project management educator serves as the backdrop to the first key moment in the framing of the thesis the *Dementors*. This painful moment in my practice (repeated in Figure 19, overleaf) serves as the moment I chose to cross the threshold and seek to develop a new way of being.

Figure 19: The Tipping Point
Source: Graham (2011a)

CHAPTER 3

METHODS OF INQUIRY: "CROSSING THE THRESHOLD"



3. METHODS OF INQUIRY: "CROSSING THE THRESHOLD"

3.1 Introduction

In this thesis I explore key elements of my professional practice that have assisted me in my journey across the threshold. This term relates to the uncomfortable moment when I appreciated the magnitude of the challenge of connecting with the theories of project management and co-creating a system of inquiry with the students. At this threshold I had a number of choices. I could have remained in the same mode of delivery, promoting a didactic pedagogy and forcing a constraining assessment regime on the students. Alternatively, I could have chosen to leave the teaching profession. In fact, what I chose to do was to cross this challenging threshold and engage in a personal research project that sought to develop my practice as a project management educator. My aspiration in undertaking this journey was to develop insights into my teaching practice that would be informed by and add value to the early careers of the students, that would be engaging for the students and would help all of us to make sense of the actuality of project management practice.

Part of this development is through a reflective inquiry into four core elements of my practice: Soft Systems Methodology, action learning, reflective practice and systemic practice, and another part of this is through an inquiry into the actuality of project management as experienced by the students on the MSc in Project Management. Making this research project one that combines the internal and external worlds of my practice gives me the opportunity to approach this in a systemic manner. By this I mean one that seeks to connect the purpose of my practice with the essence of my practice. This chapter seeks to

provide a systematic account of how I went about this external research project; a similar treatment of the internal inquiry is provided in the next chapters.

3.2 Adopting a Phenomenological Perspective

This research project sought to examine the lived experience of the students on the MSc in Project Management during their summer dissertations and in their careers. In undertaking this work I sought to more fully understand their lived experience and to use this as a contrast to what has become a taken-for-granted reality (e.g. the Bodies of Knowledge and academic discourses on project management). In this way I hope to provide rich insights into the nature of project management practice and offer an insight into what it means to be a project manager.

In considering alternative research perspectives I was drawn to a pragmatic phenomenological perspective with its commitment to focus on complex, problematic and pluralistic worlds. In adopting a phenomenological stance to this research I am consciously embracing multiple perspectives and constructing multiple realities of the problem situation. This appreciation of the social world being problematic and having specific individual meaning allows me to cast light on the socially constructed world of project management as embodied by the Bodies of Knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). By this I mean that they are a representation created through dialogical processes by a specific community of practice (Wenger & Snyder 2000). However, such a process seeks to distil a richness of individual experiences into a powerful collective narrative about what practice should be. Bakhtin (1984) emphasises the dialogical processes involved in the creation of this social reality, asserting that "truth is not to be found inside the head of the individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (1984 : 110 cited in Shotter 1997). Shotter (1997) and Gergen & Gergen (1991) focus on the social

dynamics of knowledge creation. However, these interactions are not equitable. Gillespie (1993) asserts that these negotiations are based upon power relations; where the truth may be imposed rather than emerging naturalistically. These power relations may influence the scope of the dialogue, whose voice may be heard, whose voice is suppressed etc. Consequently, by embracing multiple perspectives about project management and learning to hear what they were saying was important to them, Sanders (1982) asserts that placing one's own lived experiences to one side would create a cleaner space in which to hear the lived experiences of the students. This bracketing of my perceptions, my biases and assumptions about what it is to be a project manager and a project management educator was a significant challenge because I found that I was often seeking to place the student's account within my own account of the world (Gergen & Gergen 1991). I found that the initial interviews had a flavour where both parties were acting *'into'* our previous context (i.e. a partial tutor: student relationship) rather than allowing the understanding to emerge from the lived experience of the students (Shotter, 1997). In short I had to let go of the 'expert' position in order to hear the students' stories with greater clarity and empathy. Burrell & Morgan (1979, p. 233) describe this letting go as a deconstruction of our natural ontology of common sense. However, in explicitly embracing Checkland's (1981) notion of "*Weltanschauung*" and Mannheim's (1929) concept of "*relationism*" (knowledge must always be knowledge from a certain position) I was more able to navigate multiple positions and become a curious companion to discover meaning in the lived experience of the students.

3.3 Applying a Phenomenological Perspective

This research project sought to understand more fully the lived experiences of the students as they entered the project management profession. At the heart of this investigation was a desire to hear their stories and their accounts of practice, and to open myself up to these stories I adopted a phenomenological orientation

to the research. In choosing whose accounts I should listen to I was faced with a dilemma as to how broad and how deep I should go. Choosing breadth offered me an opportunity to hear a wide range of practices, whilst choosing depth was an affordance to get to the heart of the actuality of their practice. In the end I made a choice to consider the breadth through two interventions that were semi-detached inquiries into the lived experience as expressed in the dissertations and a further intervention to study in depth the actuality of practice via semi-structured interviews. An overview of these three levels of inquiry is presented below in Figure 20.

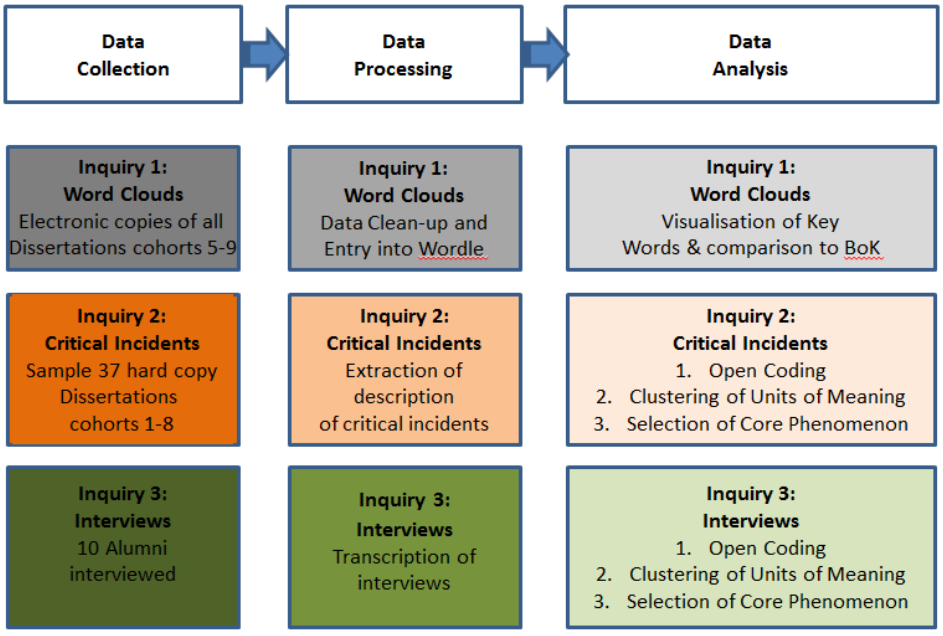


Figure 20: Overview of the Research Process
Source: author

These three levels of inquiry provide a tapestry of experiences. They are operating at different levels of inquiry but they are all able to breathe life into my appreciation of what it means 'to be' or 'to become' a project manager.

3.3.1 Word Clouds

The first level of inquiry that I undertook was stimulated by my curiosity. I was wondering what similarities, differences and patterns of experience were contained in the students' accounts of their summer projects (Hughes et al, 2007). To gain further insight I decided to take a broad data set of all of the action learning dissertations presented in the previous four years of the cohort. These dissertations provided a descriptive panorama of what the students saw as significant as they reflected on their first experience of working as a project manager. The sample for this analysis was all of the 103 action-learning dissertations submitted during the previous four years of the MSc in Project Management. The sample was limited to these four years because it was an established phase of the course during which there was stability in the modules descriptors, underlying content and teaching (and supervising) staff. These ten thousand word dissertations are written as the culmination of a ten week long action learning project. Appendix 4 provides further insight into these projects and the requirements for the dissertation.

The text file for this initial inquiry comprised of over 750,000 words. To communicate the key words that the students used to describe their practice I chose to use a word cloud as the representative device. A word cloud is a "visual depiction of words" (Ramsden & Bate 2008 p. 1) where the software plots the frequency of word by its relative size. This representation allows viewers to quickly obtain a sense of key words in an electronic data source.

The software chosen to create the word cloud was a free online resource Wordle (http://www.wordle.net/). I chose this package primarily due to its flexibility. Not only could it manage the volume of data I was entering into

it but it could also represent it in a rich variety of ways (fonts and alignment) and allowed me to delete specific words once a cloud had been created, for example the presence of ‘et’ and ‘al’ was mildly distracting in one of the clouds so I was able to exclude these from the final cloud without having to rework the data in MS Word.

Wordle automatically excludes commonly used words such as ‘the’, ‘and’. However, prior to entering the data I chose to undertake a series of data cleansing activities. I deleted other words and key terms that obscured the key data contained in this file. Therefore terms such as ‘project’, ‘dissertation’ and ‘page’ were excluded. A second round of data cleaning converted singular and plural representations into a common term, for example combining ‘stakeholder’ and ‘stakeholders’ into a single representation ‘stakeholder’.

Further rounds of data cleansing involving a more sophisticated thesaurus of terms, drawing together terms such as ‘team’ and ‘group’, were not undertaken at this stage of the analysis but remains a possibility for future pieces of work for this dataset. I appreciate the limitations of leaving this dataset at this state but chose to keep the terms as close to the students’ original expression as possible.

3.3.2. Critical Incidents

The second level of inquiry looks in greater depth at the critical incidents explored within thirty seven dissertations. These dissertations were chosen through a ‘blind’ selection of dissertations off the shelf with the only criteria being that the dissertation needed to be an action based dissertation and that all of the nine cohorts of the course had to be covered. The sample, originally thirty eight, represented one third of the

dissertations held in the office and it was believed that this level of sampling would provide over one hundred critical incidents. However, one dissertation was rejected as it was misfiled and was not an action learning dissertation. In the final data set there were thirty seven dissertations and 110 critical incidents. The sample drew in sixteen dissertations submitted by males and twenty one from females. The nationalities covered were: eleven Chinese, eight British, four Greek, three German, and one each from Columbia, France, India, Ireland, Kenya, Nigeria, Palestine, Russia, S. Africa, Spain and the Ukraine. It also covered a wide range of academic achievement with the marks ranging from eighty six per cent through to fifty two per cent. However, this achievement is not relevant to the subsequent analysis because the focus is on what was deemed to be significant in their journey to becoming project managers rather than the perceived merit of subsequent academic investigation.

3.3.3 Interviews

The third level of inquiry looks in greater depth at the actuality of the practice once the course has finished. By interviewing practising project professionals about what is significant in their practice I was seeking to understand more the actuality of project management. Thirty alumni of the MSc in Project Management were contacted asking them to take part in a phone (or face to face) interview. The basis for this selection was that they were alumni from the Lancaster MSc in Project Management programme, that they had graduated at least two years previously and that their contact details were up to date. The reason for choosing a time span of at least two years was to provide a space for them to have developed their professional practice as well as to give some distance between their relationship with myself as tutor and assessor and myself as researcher in an attempt to access stories about what was significant to them rather

than what they thought I might want to hear. Out of the thirty invitations to be interviewed ten interviews took place. Table 1, overleaf, introduces the people who took part in this project, their names have been replaced with culturally appropriate pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality but the region, sector and function are accurate (at the time of the interview).

Name	Region	Sector	Function
Marzug	Middle East	Construction	Project Officer
Ohannes	North Africa	Oil / Gas	Senior Project Manager
Jasmine	China	Event Management	Programme Coordinator
Margaret	Europe	Digital Marketing	Project Manager
Martin	Europe	Energy	Programme Manager
Catherine	Europe	Defence	Project Manager
Michael	Europe	Defence	Project Manager
Jacinata	Caribbean	Development	Project Coordinator
Ababuo	Africa	Development	Project Manager
Maria	Europe	Construction	Project Manager

Table 1: Interviews Undertaken for the Third Level of Inquiry

The interviews were focused around the question 'What was it you were doing when you realised you were acting as a project manager/project professional?' This approach was taken to encourage the students to speak as freely as possible about their experiences. Using this as the starting point, the individuals recounted a "critical incident" (Flanagan 1954) where

they sensed they were operating as a project manager and this was then explored to identify significant aspects of this action. The direction taken in the exploration was left to the discretion of the project managers as it was crucial that their sense making and their personal narrative was at the heart of the interview. This non-directive approach provided a wide range of significant experiences rather than being constrained to a defined range of topics covered by the Bodies of Knowledge.

3.4. Data Analysis

To engage in these inquiries at a systematic level I used Flanagan's (1954) Critical incident Technique. This technique offers a pragmatic way of assembling and analysing a wide range of data about real life experiences. In addition, it has a solid pedigree with over fifty years' experience in a variety of contexts[2] and offers a flexible approach to the analysis of the data.

At the core of the critical incident technique is a desire to uncover those elements of practice that are significant[3]. These significant moments are harvested to provide a "rich, personal perspective of [project management] life that facilitates [an] understanding of the issues and obstacles" faced by practising project managers (Serrat, 2010 p. 1). I believe that this technique gives a voice to the actuality of project management and that this voice is that of the people who have the deepest appreciation of their world, namely the alumni themselves. By accessing their accounts of their practice I can see similarities, differences and patterns in the experiences of the alumni that help me appreciate their world more fully (Hughes et al, 2007).

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[2] Flanagan's account illustrates the use of the critical incident technique to identify the behaviours associated with (amongst others) military leaders, dentists (Wagner 1949), industrial foremen (Finkle, 1950), life insurance heads (Weislogel, 1952) and sales clerks in department stores (Folley, 1953).

[3] Often the Critical Incident Technique is misconstrued as one that focusses on a specific crises (e.g. major conflict in a team, collapse of corporate governance or natural disaster) due to the everyday usage of the terms 'critical' and 'incident'.

The Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan 1954; Hughes et al, 2007) recommends an inductive analysis of the data in order to provide insight into the significant moments of practice. This analysis was undertaken using Hycner's (1985) guidelines for the analysis of qualitative data.

The source data for the analysis was drawn from the introductions to the dissertation and the interviews. It was broken into its constituent "units of meaning" to provide manageable blocks of data. Hycner (1985) explains that a "unit of meaning" can be of varying lengths from a few words to a sentence or paragraph. In this research project I chose to focus on units of meaning at a heuristic rather than forensic level. In this way I was choosing to analyse the themes that emerged from the data rather than unpick these at a more detailed level. This choice was primarily made because the vast majority of the dissertations and interviews were produced in the author's second language. I believed that my inability to look behind the presented text and inquire on the more forensic use of language would inhibit a more detailed investigation. For example, whilst efficiency and effectiveness have precise meanings in English in Norwegian they are both '*effektivitet*' or in Danish, leader and manager are both conveyed by the word '*leder*'.

The process for the analysis of this data is provided in the following sections.

3.4.1 Data Coding and Analysis: Critical Incidents

The source data for the critical incident analysis was the introduction to the critical incident presented in the dissertation. In this short section the student told the story of the critical incident before entering into an academic analysis of the incident. This source data extracted from the electronic copies of the dissertation and printed onto individual pieces of

paper. By representing each unit of meaning on a single piece of paper I was able to shuffle these about on a large table and to cluster together similar incidents or phenomenon. To support this process the critical incidents were analysed from four different perspectives that explored the content of the incident as well as the reflective process used by the student.

The content of the critical incidents was categorised initially using Roffey-Barentsen & Malthouse's dimensions of reflection (2009). This approach identifies broad themes contained in the critical incidents covering 'social', 'communication', 'organisational', 'personal' and 'evaluative' aspects of practice. A further perspective on the content of the critical incidents was identified through their analysis against the seven themes of the APM's Body of Knowledge (2006). These themes (see Figure 21 below) provide an insight into the areas that the UK's professional body for project management see as being crucial to practitioner accreditation and development.

Figure 21: Themes contained within the APM Body of Knowledge
Source: adapted from APM (2006b p.5)

As well as exploring the content of the critical incidents they were also examined from a learning perspective. This analysis sought to determine if the origin of the incident derived from an appreciative perspective on practice or from a deficit based approach. A further insight into the

learning opportunities identified in each incident was drawn from an analysis of the incident against Houtzagers' typology of reflection (1999).

Houtzagers' (1999) classification which aligns to single loop and double loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978) identifies five levels of learning:

- specific individual events (a dramatic incident),
- cycle of events (a recurring process),
- governing structures (that reinforce repeating patterns of behaviour),
- individual mental models, and
- collective mental models (e.g. visions or culture)

Through this analysis of the content and the learning process I was able to understand more fully what the participants see as being critical in their practice and to appreciate their level of inquiry into these incidents. Table 2, overleaf shows the full range of headings used in the critical incident analysis.

Level 1: Stimulus / Experience	• Positive, (P) • Negative, (N)
Level2: Areas of Reflection (drawn from Roffey-Barentsen & Malthouse (2009))	• Social, (S) • Communications, (C) • Organisational, (O) • Personal, (P) • Economic, (E) and • Project management technique (PMT)
Level 3: 7 Themes of the APM Body of Knowledge (2006)	• Project management in context • Planning the strategy • Executing the strategy • Techniques • Business and commercial • Organisation and governance • People and the profession
Level 4: Level of reflection (drawn from Houtzagers (1999))	• Specific / dramatic individual events, (S) • Cycle of events, (C) • Governing structures, (G) • Individual mental models, (IM) and • Collective mental models (e.g. visions or culture), (CM)

Table 2: Headings Used in the Critical Incident Analysis.

The data from this coding exercise was then captured in an Excel spread-sheet (see Table 3; below). This allowed ease of storage, access and retrieval of these incidents.

D	E	F	G	H
Incident	Roffey-Barentsen & Malthouse (2009)	APM Theme	Houtzagers (1999)	Positive/ Negative
"...when the meeting started all my self confidence and initiative quickly disappeared and I felt very embarrased and vulnerable. My two clients seemed to be so confident and prepared about the topic that I realised to be inferior and simply a student and my questions in my mind were perceived as inadequate and event 'stupid' not providing evidence of the tools and techniques aquired during my MSc. I started to loose my linguistic ability and my body language was clear as well" 2007 p. 10	S	7.7	S	N
"processes are 'continuously shaped. Invented and need to be modified' in light of the environment (Argyris and Schon 1978 p.31) 2007 p. 19	O	6.9	C	N/A
"I did not exchange information in a productive way as the communication channel was surely not 'one-on-one' or 'one-on-two' but 'one-on-nobody'" 2007 p. 26	C	7.1	S	N

Table 3: Extract from the Data Coding Table for the Critical Incidents
Source: author

3.4.2. Data Coding and Analysis: Interviews

The source data for the interview analysis was the full transcript of the interview. These had been produced by a professional typist from the audio recording of the data. This transcript was analysed to identify all of the specific units of meaning contained in them. The number of units of meaning that were identified in each interview ranged from sixteen through to thirty.

As with the critical incidents, each unit of meaning was printed onto individual pieces of paper and a large table was used to shuffle these around. This process of analysis was carried out in a hands on manner on the table (rather than via qualitative analysis software) because it allowed me to see the big picture.

Whereas the clustering for the critical incidents was around the various themes (see table 2) in the interviews they were inductive, drawn through an open coding exercise. This open coding exercise used the natural

language of the interview to create clusters of similar incidents or phenomena. Through this process 29 themes emerged, see Table 4.

Broad theme	sub theme
adaptability	flexibility
adaptability	main
adaptability	structure
communications	conflict
communications	contextual
communications	
communications	difference that makes difference
communications	informal
communications	messy
communications	missed connections
ethics	
ethics	contract
PM tools	
PM tools	explicit
PM tools	implicit
PM tools	transferable
politics	buy-in
politics	conflict
politics	personal interest
politics	power
politics	turf wars
reflexivity	
stakeholders	
stakeholders	communication
stakeholders	demanding
team	
team	critical focus'
team	diversity
team	motivation

Table 4: Themes Emerging from Open Coding of the Interviews
Source: author

The “units of meaning” within a theme were then explored to identify relationships between them. By identifying the similarities or identifiable differences within a cluster, I was able to extract meaning from the data

and to see shared stories of significance. These were later entered into Excel for ease of coding and data storage.

Having identified the clusters a further step was taken to identify the core phenomena. As I experimented with various headings for these phenomena which represented the systematic and systemic aspects of project management practice I was conscious of the nuances between formal language (e.g. as expressed by the APM themes) and figurative language. I chose to represent these core phenomena with figurative language to facilitate the communication of the findings with a wider audience.

The thematic titles I settled on for the interview analysis were the project manager as:

- **Artisan**. This dimension reflects the 'craft' skills of the project manager and their ability to deploy the tools of their trade with a degree of mastery.
- **Bricoleur**. A person who creates things out of what is available. At the heart of the original French term is a notion of fiddling or tinkering rather than a systematic approach. This dimension explores how the project managers have to be adaptable and work with what is at hand rather than the specified practices, methods or tools declared by the professional bodies.
- **Ambassador**. An ambassador is the personally appointed representative of a head of state. Using this metaphor I am seeking to give voice to the way in which the project manager often becomes the embodiment of a project and how they may be constantly working as an advocate for the project.

- **Politician**. Projects exist within an organisation context immersed with power and politics. To survive in this field the project manager needs to understand and work with these resources and this dimension provides an account of these experiences.
- **Champion.** The project champion is working on behalf of the community. Often, as in the folk-tales of our youth, they are sent out to battle with the daemons on behalf of the project team. At other, more mundane times their role is to create the vision, the energy in the community and strive to drive the project forward, against whatever odds.

In naming the themes I was conscious that these labels would be central to the reporting of the research to my peers as well as to future students. Consequently I tried to make these headings invitations for others to look further and so thematic titles try to convey some mystery as well as meaning.

3.5 Discussion

In approaching this research project from a phenomenological perspective I have made a conscious choice; one that values depth over breadth, with the explicit purpose of seeking to understand the experience of a small number of individuals rather than to gain insights into a broader population. However, such a choice does not mean that I should ignore issues of validity, generalizability and reliability although it may mean that these terms have a different meaning in the context of this inquiry.

In considering the issue of validity my prime concern is to demonstrate that this research project is observing what I say I am observing (Mason, 2002). Maxwell (1992) developed five categories of reliability in qualitative research namely:

descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, generalisability, and evaluative validity.

The notion of descriptive validity implies that the reported data accurately reflects what the participants have said or done. In this research project, two of the sources of data were drawn directly from the participants' own words. The other data source was the interviews that were transcribed by a professional audio-typist. These transcriptions were then checked by myself as part of a process of getting familiar with the data to assure myself that it was valid. In considering the interpretative validity of the research I was conscious that I needed to relay the participants' sense making of the events rather than overlay onto this my own. Therefore during the interviews I was aware that I should ask clarifying questions where I was unsure of their exact meaning. The efficacy of this approach was, perhaps, limited due to the number of interviews that were held over the phone rather than face to face, where the intonations implied by body language could be discerned. However, in all cases I sought to ensure that the participants spoke in their own words about the topics that mattered to them.

The desire to focus the research on the participants' own appreciation of their experience has an impact on the 'generalizability' of the findings. Auerbach & Silverstein (1993) define two levels of theory generation that are applicable to phenomenological research. The first is abstract external generalisability that is holistic in nature and offers potential implications to a wide range of situations. This is supported by internal generalisability that is specific and applies to the detailed situation under consideration. This internal generalisability is created with the understanding that each specific situation has its own unique characteristics that can influence the application of a situation specific theory. However, it is still possible to offer holistic insights into the experience and practice of project management that may be relevant to other practitioners, for

example the importance of understanding other stakeholders' worldviews as a precursor to appreciating their requirements. Working at this level of generalizability, this thesis offers awareness rather than directives that can be insightful to other project managers and project management educators.

Maxwell's (1992) fifth test 'evaluative' validity develops the notion of descriptive validity to understand the source of interpretations of the data. By using Hycner's (1985) guidelines to 'bracket' my assumptions at the start of the research project I was aware of some of these influences and better able to keep them in check during the data analysis.

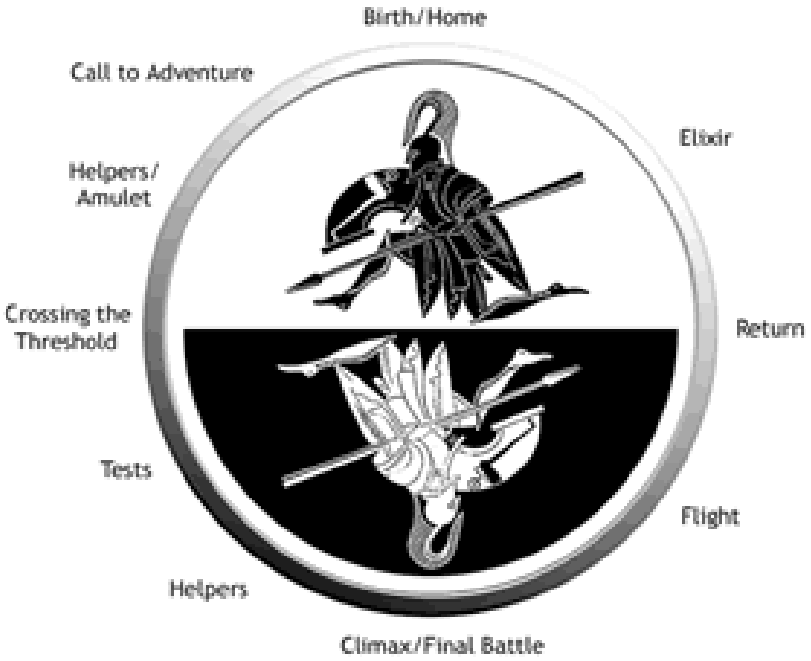
In appreciating these tests of validity at the design and implementation stage of the research I was able to create a systematic approach to the research that positioned my role firstly as a story teller of the students' experiences. Once I had elicited their experience I could then contrast them to the experiences of the other students in similar situations and highlight similarities and differences between these accounts, in order to more fully understand the range of experiences that students from the MSc in Project Management have in their early careers.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an insight into the methods that I have used to draw out a range of meaning from the primary research that was undertaken for the thesis. By combining Flanagan's (1954) and Hycner's (1985) techniques for structuring phenomenological data I have sought to provide a robust but flexible approach to the analysis of the experiences of the MSc in Project Management students. This analysis will be presented later in the thesis in Chapter 7. Before moving into the presentation of this data I will provide a reflective account of my living theory. This account looks at the theoretical underpinning of my practice in

order to consider the efficacy and effectiveness of my deployment and to appreciate how I can enhance my practice in the future.

“HELPERS”


Birth/Home
Call to Adventure
Elixir
Helpers/
Amulet
Crossing the
Threshold
Return
Tests
Flight
Helpers
Climax/Final Battle

HELPERS: INTRODUCTION TO MY LIVING THEORY

In the previous chapters I laid out a context for this thesis which described how I entered the teaching profession after an accidental career as a project manager. It went on to provide an insight into the intellectual grounding of my practice within the discourses of project management.

This section of the thesis (Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7) provides insight into the methods that influence my actions, my living theory (Marshall, 2001). The methods that are covered are: firstly, Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) (Checkland 1981, 2000, Checkland & Scholes, 1990, Checkland & Poulter, 2006; Wilson 1984); secondly, Action Learning (Revans, 1981, 1998; Schön, 1983, 1987); thirdly, Reflective Practice (Dewey, 1910, 1964, 2007, Bolton, 2010 & Brookfield 2002) and fourthly Systemic Practice (Harlene Andersen 1997, Anderson 1990, Bateson 1972, 1979). In considering these methods I am seeking to describe, account for and to learn from my work on the MSc in Project Management. These insights will address the first research question.

> **Research Question 1:** How do I as an educator draw upon the practices of systems and systemic thinking, action learning and reflective practice in order to create meaningful educational environments for project managers?

These methods have helped me to remain curious and flexible in my day to day practice by treating little as "fixed, finished [or] clear cut" (Marshall, 1999 p. 156). By this I mean that they encourage me to be alive and aware of my context, my choices and my actions. The lenses of my living theory have been deliberately

chosen from a wide array offered to me in my professional career. In choosing them I am seeking to balance two specific dimensions of practice. The first dimension looks to balance the strength of my systematic approach to situations with a recognition that it is only through communicative acts that I can facilitate change in a social world. The second dimension is one that seeks to balance a natural disposition for thoughtful behaviour with a need for purposeful action. The relationship between these lenses is illustrated in Figure 22, below.

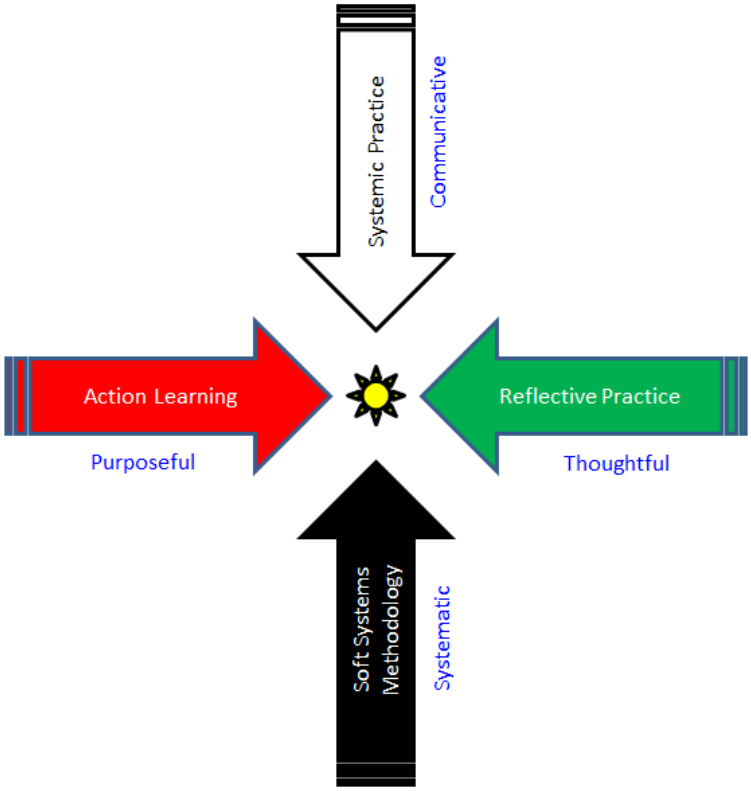


Figure 22: Elements of my Living Theory

Source: author

Before looking at these approaches in detail I will explain how I use my living theory to open up arenas for my self-reflection and professional development. Rather than having a formulaic 'x' step model to enhancing practice I use the different invitations provided by these methods as a way of casting light on a

situation. For example, using SSM as an ontological lens helps me to create an understanding of different possible perceptions, interests and representations of reality. By externalising my appreciation of the various domains of knowledge (e.g. 'knowing that', 'knowing why' and 'knowing how' Ryle (1949) and Polyani (1958)) I can model alternative possible courses of action.

In contrast to the systematic insights that SSM offers me I will consciously balance this approach with a systemic approach. The potential to align these two approaches is seen in a shared appreciation of working as a learning system, naming the intervention and viewing the connections between entities. In addition to this reinforcement of key elements of SSM practice, the systemic thinking helps me to focus on the processes of co-creation of knowledge through dialogical practices. This reaching out to connect with the other actors involved in the situation is fundamental to a richer appreciation of problem situations and the development of contextually sensitive ways forward.

The conceptual world of SSM provides me with a way of thinking situations through. This is supported by the action learning approach which provides a framework for engaging in, and learning from the moment of practice. By situating myself as a 'learner' I am conscious of a continual process of pragmatic experimentation and adaption in order to enhance the learning experience for both the students and myself. Perhaps the most dramatic example of my desire to immerse myself in an action learning mindset is when I stepped away from my life in Lancaster in September 2010 to teach in Beijing for a period of 5 months. This was a conscious way of providing a context where I would be forced to consider my practice differently and seek to develop it in response to a new and emergent context.

The third leg of this living theory is reflective practice. By consciously inquiring about significant experiences, I seek to learn from my everyday existence and to

develop potential courses of action for future iterations of practice. By looking through my surface level actions into my personal motivations I intend to challenge my practice and to resist the temptations of hubris and complacency.

Figure 23, overleaf illustrates the way that these lenses connect and inform my practice. Naturally they do not stand alone and a situation may encourage me to engage in a multi-dimensional inquiry, for example using both SSM and action learning.

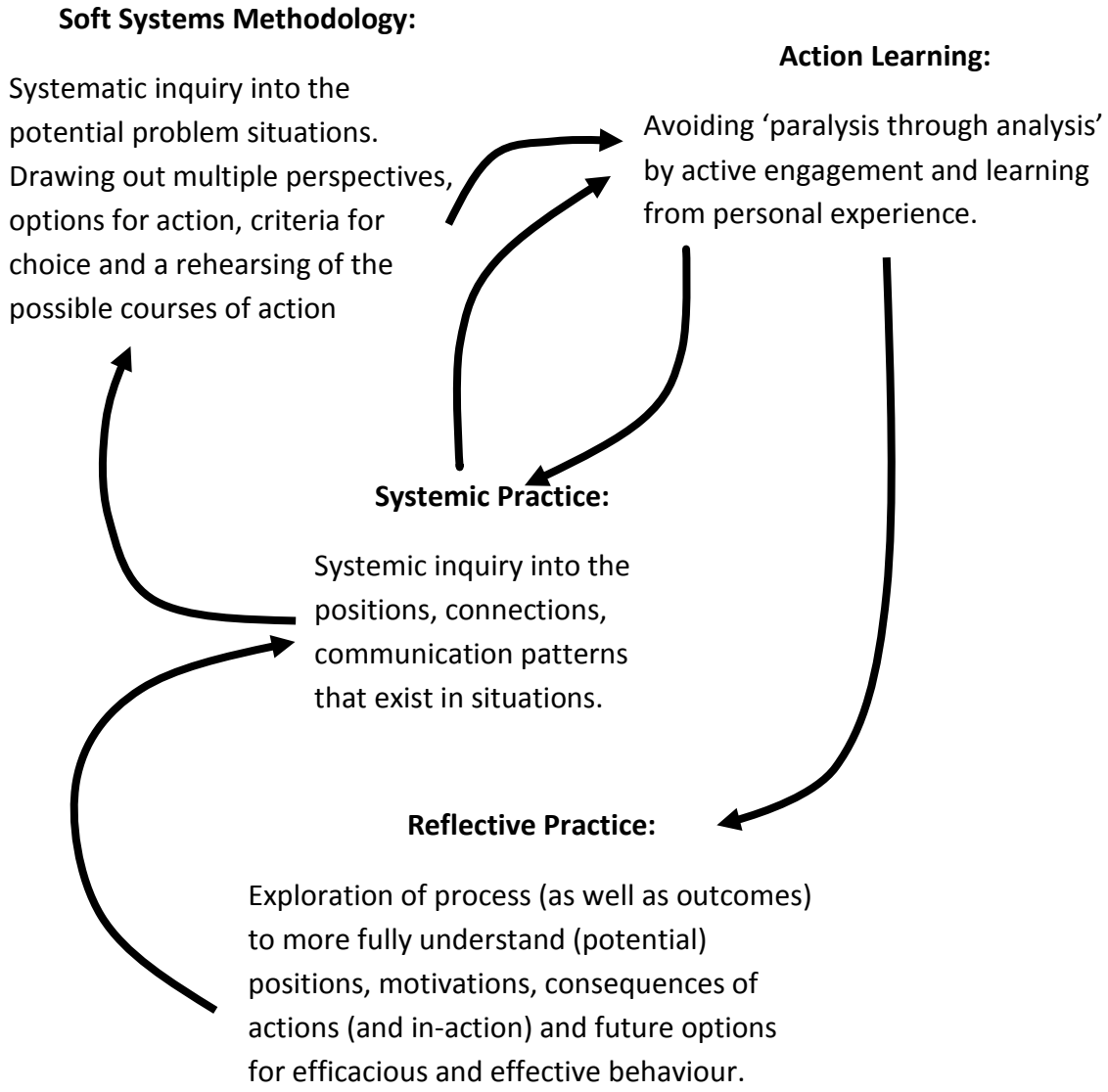
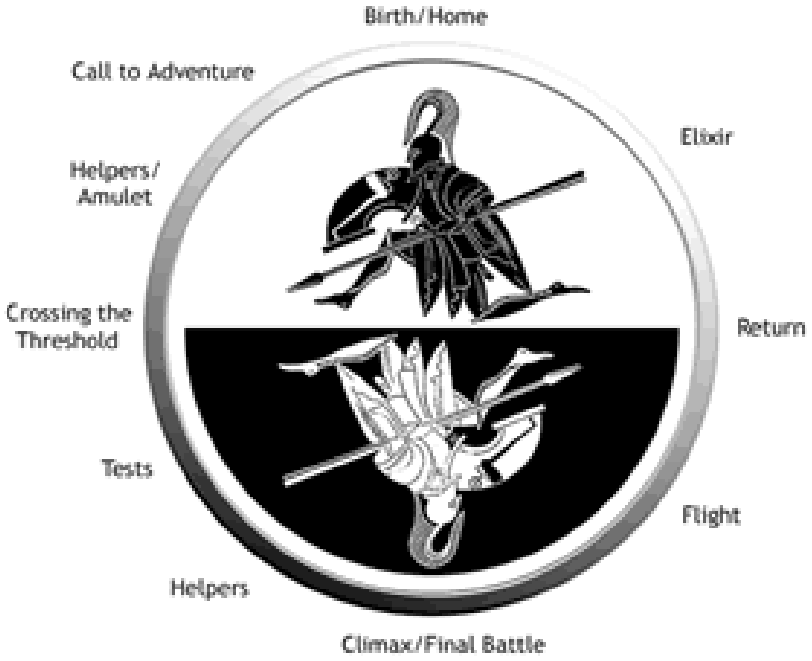


Figure 23: Living Theory: Exploring my Practice through Different Lenses

The following chapters in this section will consider each of these methods as praxis combining academic and personal insights in order to develop my appreciation of these methods and their role in developing a new generation of project management practitioners.

CHAPTER 4:

“HELPERS”: SOFT SYSTEMS METHODOLOGY



4. HELPERS: SOFT SYSTEMS METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will provide an account of my engagement with Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) and how this approach has helped me to become more alert and curious about my professional world. My learning journey in SSM goes back to 1990 when I studied for the MSc Information Management (Lancaster University). At the heart of this course was a problem structuring approach, SSM, which aligned the world of systems thinking into the social world of ”messy problem situations” (Checkland 1981, 2000, Checkland & Scholes, 1990, Checkland & Poulter, 2006).

4.2 Core Concepts in Systems Thinking

SSM embraces seven key systems concepts as a way of developing a richer appreciation of real world problem situations. The first is the notion that the “map is not the territory” (Bateson, 1979 p.30). By this I mean that the work that is undertaken in a systems world is a social construct that helps the investigators to take action in the real world rather than being a precise and accurate representation of the real world. A significant challenge in this form of inquiry is to make the systems model simple enough to be able to use it to take positive steps forward whilst avoiding such an over simplification that it adds little value or insight.

The second core concept is that systems thinking is undertaken with the purpose of transforming the situation. As such the model seeks to draw in appropriate inputs and convert these into a required output. This process of transformation

is visualised in an activity model that is created at a named and uniform level of operation. This level of inquiry forms part of a hierarchy of structured systems (the third concept) and as such the system under investigation is the deconstruction of an element of a higher order system whilst at the same time each component of the system under investigation can be decomposed into its constituent parts. This notion of a layered hierarchy that can be connected to higher order systems as well as sub-systems leads into the fourth element, the connectivity of the system elements.

The connectivity of a system is seen not only in the way in which the systems are hierarchically organised but also in the connections of the elements that constitute the system under investigation. By paying attention to the connections between and within systems, the flow of the system can be explored and its effectiveness more clearly understood. However, the systemic principle to connect these components is held in check to prevent a situation where the system becomes an intellectual exercise in demonstrating the six degrees of separation. To hold this intellectual game in check the investigators name a boundary to the system (the fifth core concept). This artificial boundary helps to focus attention on what is perceived to be important whilst at the same time reducing the scope of the investigation. The sixth core concept is the notion that the system is responsive to feedback, from within the system as well as from interconnecting systems. With this notion of a dynamic system that is developing through closed and open loop feedback brings to the fore a key aspect of organisation life; namely you get what you measure. Considering the forms of stimuli that a system is operating under helps the investigator to appreciate where significant changes can be made to enhance the efficacy and effectiveness of the system.

The seventh, and final, core concept of systems thinking is the notion of emergence; by which I mean that the output of the system is more than the sum

of its constituent parts. By drawing together the constituent parts and seeing their interactions we can appreciate the social chemistry that is at work that may create significant added value or conversely significant confusion, disorder or ambiguity.

4.3 Development of Soft Systems Methodology

Systems theory was developed and deployed in the post-war period within a wide range of contexts. It was during cycles of active research in the 1960s that Checkland and his colleagues at Lancaster University identified that this framework of concepts was not sufficient to gain a robust understanding of the "messy problem situations" of management (Checkland 1981, 2000, Checkland & Scholes, 1990, Checkland & Poulter, 2006). Their response to this challenge was to broaden the notion of systems engineering from a 'hard' paradigm to one that incorporated a 'soft' paradigm. Specifically they embraced three further concepts.

Firstly, every situation that they engaged in was a "human activity system" in which people were "attempting to take purposeful action which was meaningful for them" (Checkland, 2000 p.13). Naturally, what is meaningful to one person may be alien to another or as Checkland asserts one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter (Checkland 1981).

Secondly, accepting the complexity of human affairs and the broad range of world views (Checkland uses the term *Weltanschauung*) that may come into contact with any given problem situation creates a plethora of possible systems at work at any one time. Taking a single worldview is likely to create (at best) no more than a partial solution.

The third difference that distinguishes soft systems as being different to the hard paradigm is the shift in perspective from a specific 'problem' to a messy 'problem situation'. By turning their attention to a problem situation the practitioner is seeking to embrace various dimensions of the situation rather than jump into an immediate / programmed response where the 'solution' to issues is seen to be lying in the realm of our expertise. By keeping diagnostic judgements in check the practitioner may be able to unearth deeper or more obscure aspects of the situation that are critical to successful change. Checkland asserts that the initial naming of the system is a key stage of the problem solving process (Checkland 2000).

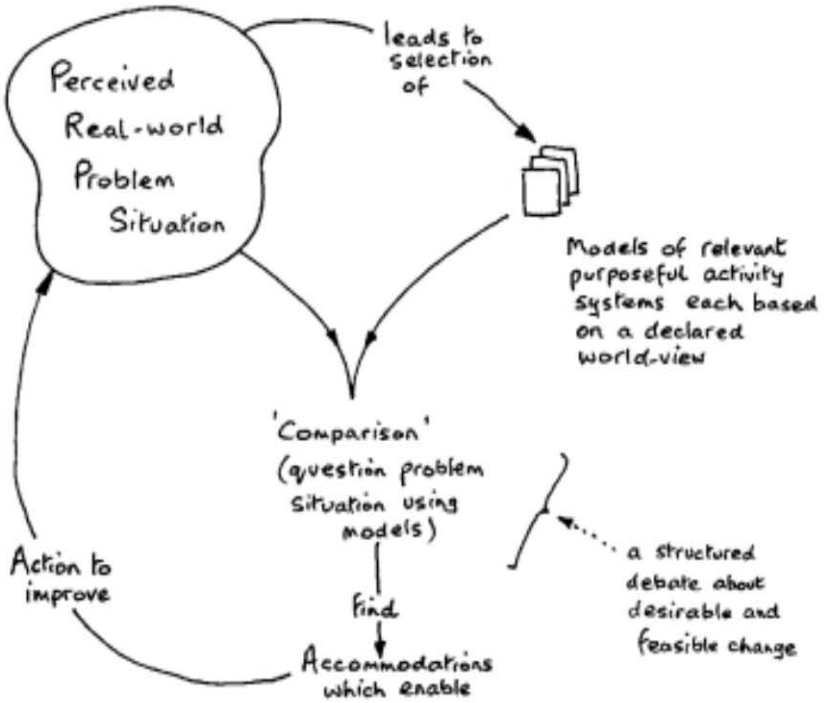
By embracing these three additional concepts the nature of a soft systems inquiry changes from one that seeks the solution to a problem to one that seeks to become an organized learning system. The objective of such a system is to uncover rich layers of understanding about a problem situation and provide the temporal and conceptual space for dialogue and learning about possible courses of action. Figure 24, overleaf, illustrates the deployment of SSM as a system for inquiry and learning.

4.4 Soft Systems Methodology as an Organized Learning System

The inquiring / learning cycle of SSM is centred on a structured analysis of a problem situation. This analysis resides in the 'systems thinking world' and embraces a variety of worldviews and perspectives in order to stretch the space for solutions beyond a 'blue sky approach' that privileges the power bases of a few.

Key to this analysis is the series of conceptual models that explore relevant human activity systems. The ideas that emerge from the models are subjected to two acid tests: are the proposed changes systemically feasible and culturally

desirable? These tests seek to identify changes that will both improve the problem situation *and* be acceptable in this situation.



Principles

- real world : a complexity of relationships
- relationships explored via models of purposeful activity based on explicit world-views
- inquiry structured by questioning perceived situation using the models as a source of questions
- 'action to improve' based on finding accommodations (versions of the situation which conflicting interests can live with)
- inquiry in principle never-ending ; best conducted with wide range of interested parties ; give the process away to people in the situation

Figure 24: The inquiring / learning cycle of SSM

Source: Checkland 2000 p. 16

The efficacy of SSM as a method for a systemic inquiry is attested to by Ison (2008), Tajino et al (2005), Hodges, Ferreira & Israel (2012) and Checkland (2000). Ison (2008) epistemologically locates SSM within systemic practice by recognising it as a framework of inquiry (rather than solution) and learning (rather than goal seeking). Tajino et al (2005) argue that the focus on the emergent properties that arise from the overall system rather than being located in a particular aspect is indicative of a systemic rather than systematic practice. Hodges, Ferreira & Israel (2012) recognise SSM as a flexible and responsive method for learning about systemic change. A key aspect of this learning comes through from the ability of SSM to give multiple perspectives on the issue and to allow the practitioner to maintain a wider 'whole system' appreciation of the problem situation as well as focussing on specific details.

The deployment of SSM as a systemic process of inquiry and learning (Connell, 2001) has been assisted by a more flexible deployment of SSM referred to as Mode 2 (Checkland, 2000). The focus in Mode 2 is on an internalised process of sense making that is *interacting with* rather than *intervening in* the context. Working in this mode the epistemology of SSM is as a participatory approach; one that "primarily provides a space for individuals to interact and share insights and a focus towards problem solving" (Bell & Morse 2012 p.2). The key features and differences of this internalised process are highlighted inTable5 below.

Mode 1		Mode 2
Methodology-driven	vs	Situation-driven
Intervention	vs	Interaction
Sometimes sequential	vs	Always iterative
SSM as an external recipe	vs	SSM as an internalized model

Table 5: Differences Between Mode 1 and Mode 2 SSM

Source: Checkland 2000 p. 39

This transition from Mode 1 to Mode 2 is evident in my personal practice. In the years immediately after I was introduced to this method in 1990 I used SSM to craft detailed and complex third party accounts of external situations. In many ways I was trying to play the role of an expert practitioner. Whilst these models and interventions received praise for my technical skill in using the toolkit they frequently fell short of my aspirations to improve the situation. A shift in my practice to Mode 2 SSM has resulted in a style of modelling that is more facilitative, seeking the contribution of the hands-on actors in a situation. By using SSM as a way of sharing our appreciation and structuring the thoughts of a range of stakeholders I have found that the output is frequently clearer, more focussed on the needs of the community and more productive in terms of moving towards improvements.

The benefit of using SSM as a participatory approach is attested to in a rich array of contexts. Mulgan (2001) explores its use in a governmental setting, Kalim et el (2006) in health care, Winter (2006) in business, Avison & Wood-Harper (1990) and Checkland & Holwell (1998) in IT, Wilson (1984) in control engineering, Hodges, Ferreira & Israel (2012) in mental health services, Taylor & DaCosta (1999) in SMEs and Sankaran, et al (2002) in organisational change. In my personal practice I use SSM as the way of pausing before the action and considering the possible worldviews and diversity of activity systems that may be at play in any situation.

4.5 Soft Systems Methodology in my Professional Practice

SSM provides me with a way to explore situations and take deliberate rather than appetitive steps towards achieving sustainable change in my practice. As part of the professional doctorate process I have used it to structure potential interventions, develop my understanding of the requirements and my ideas for enhancing my practice.

Over the course of this inquiry into my professional practice I have created over 50 different models to help me understand areas of my practice. An example of this is shown in Figure 25 (below) which shows a system to re-launch the MSc in Project Management. Further examples are included in Appendix 5 as an example of the insights I have obtained and the work I am committed to pursuing in the future.

The specific benefits that this approach has offered me include creating a space and language for discussing enhancements to the programme with current students, being more courageous in some of the design choices and being more accommodating in my relationships with colleagues.

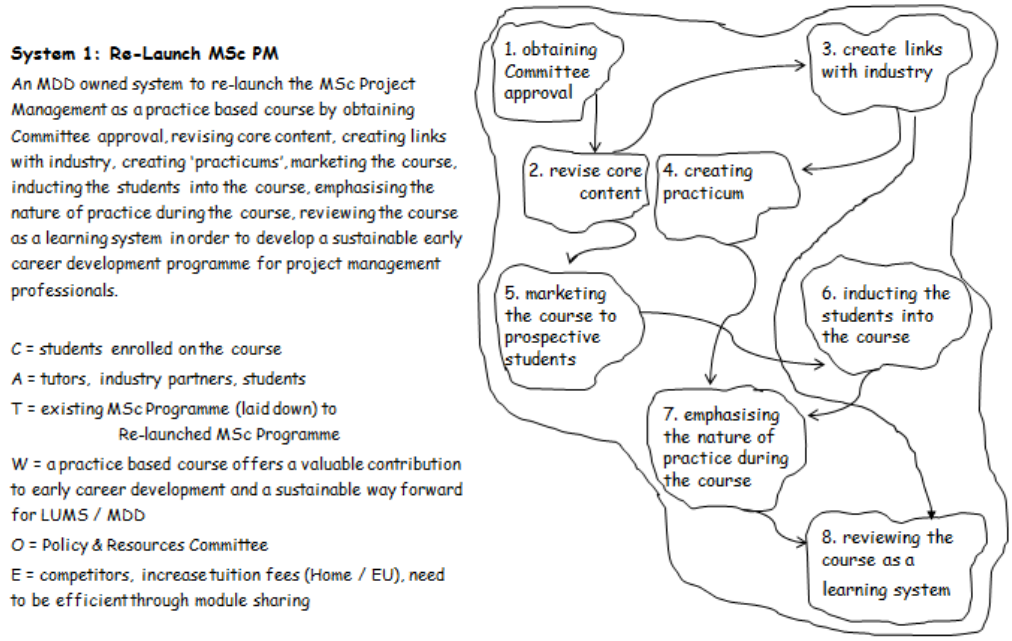


Figure 25: Example of SSM Model Relevant to MSc PM

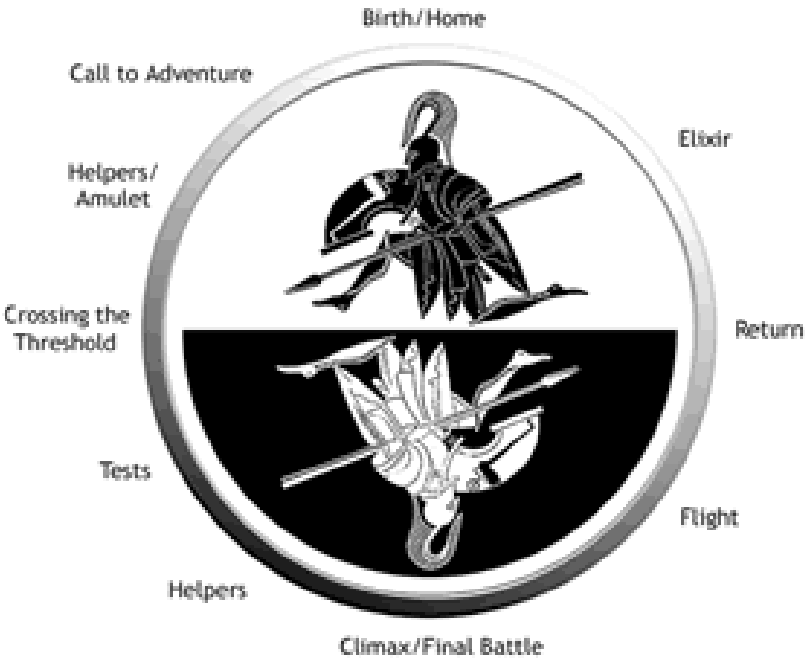
4.6 Conclusion

In this section I have presented SSM as part of my living theory. My praxis, as shown in the models created in Appendix 5 illustrates the deployment of this method as a way of gaining entry and insight into situations.

Grounding my inquiry in the tradition of SSM I have been more able to embrace core systemic concepts in my everyday practice. These include the recognition and appreciation of differing worldviews, the power of interconnecting systems and possibilities of multiple courses of action. In addition, the use of SSM in Mode 2 has encouraged me to undertake collaborative inquiry through the creation of a dialogically based problem solving space rather than relying on my own skills and abilities.

CHAPTER 5:

“HELPERS”: ACTION LEARNING



5. ACTION LEARNING

5.1 Introduction

This section of the thesis provides an account of key elements of my professional practice. Having provided an account in the previous chapter of the way I deploy SSM as a sense making method, in this chapter I will introduce, appreciate and critique my practice as an action learning "*accoucher*" (Revans, 1988).

Revans defines the role of an "*accoucher*" as a "managerial midwife who sees that their organisation gives birth to a new idea, without themselves needing to attest either its past origins or its future nourishment in any professional sense" (1998 p.110). By adopting this position I am seeking to co-create a systemic learning environment that "seeks to throw a net around slippery experiences, and capture them as learning, i.e. as replicable behaviour in similar contexts and as a source of questions in differing contexts" (Smith & O'Neill 2003, p.64).

This chapter serves as an explicit development of my practice beyond the mantra, "Trust the process". It provides an account of the origins of action learning and the sensibilities I need to be aware of in order to deploy it with an appropriate level of understanding.

5.2 Action Learning: Origins, Purpose and Benefits

Action learning, also referred to as incidental learning (Marsick and Watkins, 1997) and project based learning (DeFillippi, 2001), resides in a broad array of methods collectively called action research. These value-led orientations to inquiry aspire to link practice and ideas, including but not limited to academic theory, in the service of human flourishing (Reason and Bradbury 2008).

The role of an active pedagogy has been debated for close to a century. Advocates such as Dewey (1910), Vygotsky (1962) and Laurillard (2002) argue for the criticality of a co-constructed learning world where the 'students' and 'teachers' actively learn together through 'real world' experiences. Whilst this debate does not undermine the necessity to have a formal curriculum it asserts that this curriculum alone is not enough to stimulate 'real' learning.

The roots of action learning as an explicit approach to this active pedagogy lie in the work of Reg Revans (1971, 1980, 1981 & 1998), Donald Schön (1983, 1987) and David Kolb (1984). Revans's work with the National Coal Board (UK) identified the benefit that experienced managers gained through the exchange of ideas around real problems. Schön (1983, 1987) researched the professional development of professionals identifying that the crucial aspects of their professional practice are not as per the book and go beyond the cold theory of professional training programmes. Schön's investigation into the actuality of professional practice surfaced a fundamental tension between the high ground of theory and the swamp of practice (see Figure 26, overleaf) asserting that:

> In the varied typography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solutions through the application of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems defy technical solution. The irony of this situation is that the problems of the high ground tend to be relatively

> unimportant to individuals or society at large, however great their technical interest may be, while in the swamp lie the problems of greatest human concern. The practitioner must choose. Shall he remain on the high ground where he can solve relatively unimportant problems according to prevailing standards of rigor, or shall he descend to the swamp of important problems ….
>
> (Schön 1987 p. 3)

Figure 26: The high, hard ground of theory overlooking the swamp of practice
Source: Graham 2011b

This tension between rigour and relevance is played out in many institutions responsible for training the professional. Schön (1987) claims that there is a "nagging doubt that some research is getting too academic and that [we] may be neglecting to teach managers how to put into effect the strategies which they develop (1987 p.10). Revans sums up this rigour or relevance debate by asserting that:

> A man may well learn to talk about taking action *simply* by talking about taking action (as in classes at a business school) but to learn

> to take action (as something distinct from learning to talk about taking action) then he needs to take *action* (rather than to talk about taking action) and to see the effect, not of talking about taking action (at which he may appear competent) but of *taking* the action *itself* (at which he may fall somewhat short of competent).
>
> (Revans 1971 pp. 54-5 original emphasis).

The efficacy of action learning as an approach in workplace learning has been attested to by many researchers (e.g. Picciano 2002, Smart & Csapo 2007, Watkins, 2005, Marquardt & Banks, 2010 and Clarke et al, 2006). Within the context of formal education Bonwell & Eison (1991) assert that it is beneficial because of the active involvement by the students, its emphasis on development of skills, rather than transmitting information, and also the need for the students to explore their own attitudes and values. De Haan (2004) develops this appreciation by asserting that there are four key advantages of using an action learning pedagogy. Firstly, because the learning is grounded in real, that is practical situations, the students will gain extra stimulation through the engagement with the complexities and ambiguities of the situation. In addition, the notion that the participants are 'at risk' increases their engagement with the problem situation. Secondly, an action learning approach facilitates the development of 'slow thinking' which allows for the postponement of judgment and gives rise to a space for new connections and new answers to arise. Thirdly, De Haan (2004) asserts that the pedagogy develops a meta-skill set that includes the giving and receiving of personal feedback. The fourth stated advantage is that it provides the participants with opportunities for parallel learning about "the world in which one lives and one's own particular place within it" (Wicks, Reason & Bradbury, 2008 p. 17). By gaining an insight into our behaviour and actions outside of the formal action learning situations, it encourages the participants to develop the skills to "learn from the here and now" (de Haan 2004 p. 218).

5.3 The Process of Action Learning

Whilst Revans articulated his purpose in using action learning he was less precise in his definition of the process or the applied methods of action learning. This gap is (at least) partially filled by David Kolb's account of experiential learning accommodated in his learning cycle (1984).

The learning cycle is grounded in Dewey's pragmatism that "knowledge is acquired through responding to a real life need" (Wicks, Reason & Bradbury 2008 p. 19). Kolb develops our understanding of the action learning process by focusing on the need to do something *other* than just having an experience. He sees learning as an active process "whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (Kolb 1984, p. 41). Kolb identified two modes of grasping experience, namely through concrete experience and abstract conceptualization, and combined these with the two transformative processes of reflective observation and active experimentation. Together these create an iterative learning cycle (see Figure 27, overleaf).

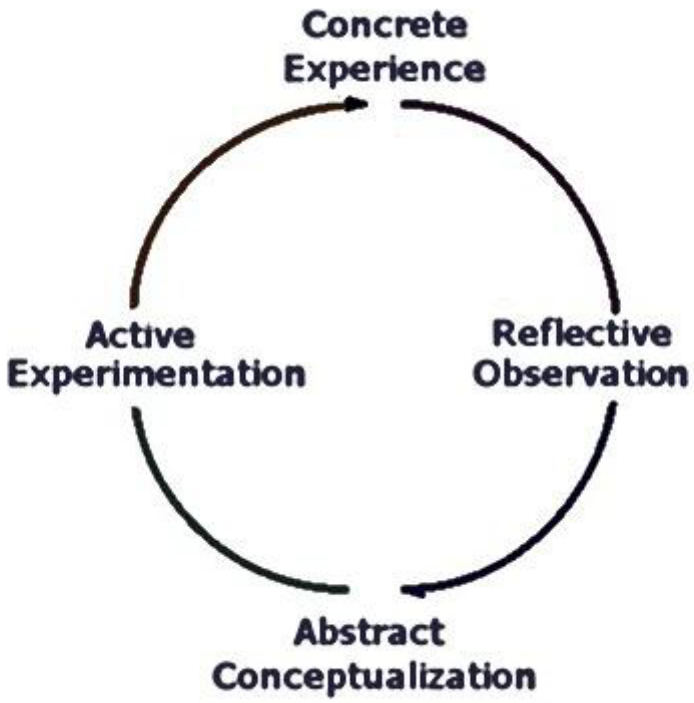


Figure 27: Kolb's Learning Cycle
Source: adapted from Kolb (1984)

In considering this cycle further I am drawn to focus on the intellectual space between the experience and the reflection stages. Kolb (1984) refers to this as the "diverging phase" and I see this as a critical step in drawing sustainable learning from the action. The step aligns to Dewey's (1910) first stage of reflective practice where we encounter a problem before moving to the second stage of naming the problem. Once a problem is named (or labelled) it takes on a more concrete form and consequently the ability to spot the 'correct' rather than the obvious problem is a significant challenge. De Haan & de Ridder (2006) assert that the deployment of a broad range of observational, empathetic and imaginative abilities enables learners to develop a holistic appreciation of the problem situation and make an informed choice on the root cause of the problem rather than the surface issues. Tinsley and Lebak (2009) recommend the deployment of experienced practitioners to help expand reflexive capacity through the formation of learning sets, personal coaching and tutor support.

Tinsley and Lebak's (2009) zone of reflexive capacity also facilitates the processes of 'assimilation' and 'convergence' where the experienced practitioner can guide the academic inquiry away from a specific incident and into a conceptual appreciation of the root cause, including guidance into appropriate 'pragmatic' theories and personal theories of action. However, the zone of reflexive capacity may only take people so far. It can assist in the recognition of appropriate avenues of exploration and can support the academic inquiry into these moments of practice; it cannot assume the responsibility for taking steps to enhance practice. In short, there is still the requirement for the learner to take responsibility for their learning.

As the learner works through some of the potentially useful concepts and the contextual reality of their future practice they draw forward a personal accommodation. This takes account of their personal preferences and consideration of what new action to take as well as how to take it, in order to create a formal action for, or an anticipation of future practice (see Figure 28, overleaf).

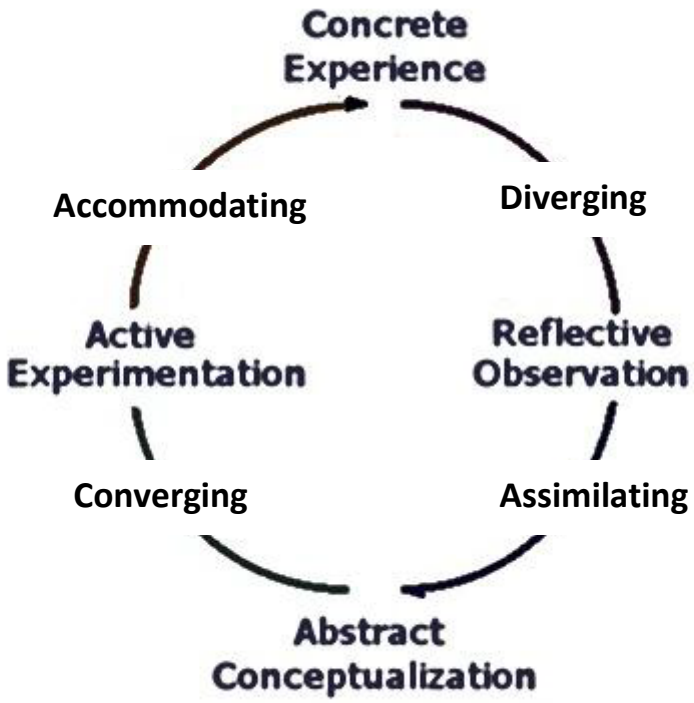


Figure 28: Kolb's Learning Cycle: Part 2
Source: adapted from Kolb (1984)

Whilst Kolb's (1984) learning cycle has been widely spoken about and commodified as an explanation of the action learning process Revans (1981) was more elusive. Responding to inquiries from people seeking to know what action learning is and how they should do it, he asserted "there is one way, and one way alone, of getting to 'know' what action learning is, and that is by doing it' (Revans 1981 p.9).

Whilst Revans (1981) was reluctant to provide a definitive process for action learning he identified four key elements of practice. These are the application of a scientific method, the pursuit of a rational decision, the exchange of sound advice (and fair criticism) and the learning of new behaviour(s) (ibid p.11). In tune with this (scientific) view he presented an equation for learning (L) as being comprised of programmed knowledge (P) drawn from information in current use,

that is, an organisation's memory as well as lectures, case studies and the like, plus questioning insight (Q).

$$L=P+Q$$

Later authors have sought to develop an explicit statement of the learning processes associated with action learning. Marquardt (1999) asserts that the great questions that benefit from action learning also provide the foundations for effective reflective practice and consequently incorporates reflection which he defines as "recalling, thinking about, pulling apart, making sense, trying to understand" (1999 p. 29) into the formula.

$$L=P+Q+R$$

In considering these formulae in light of the evidence from my research project (see Chapter 8) I am conscious that these notations encourage the practitioner to focus on specific incidents, especially if they are aligned to a process to explore the "Aha!" moments (Cope & Watts (2000), McGill & Beaty (1995) and Taylor & Thorpe (2004). This emphasis on a critical incident strategy seems to privilege the moment of the great revelation (like the ending of a complex murder mystery) at the expense of the less dramatic feelings.

In contrast to Marquardt's (1999) great questions there may be significant benefit in exploring restless themes of practice. These may not reach boiling point on our self-regulating thermometer but are still nagging away in the background. Consequently, having a description of action learning that communicates learning as a *process* rather than a *moment* could provide a balance. Mumford (1997) partially addresses this need for a process of learning by placing the action learning within a series of P and Q interactions rather than a single cycle:

$$Q1 + P + Q2 = L$$

Mumford's (1997) notation emphasises the position of the learning within a larger narrative (or context) and may also help position a forward looking stance amongst the learners to anticipate future contexts. In addition to a depiction of the learning process that recognises thematic as well as dramatic learning moments I believe it is useful to consider the problem naming aspects of the learning cycle such as Kolb's moment of diverging. By incorporating the ability to recognise and appropriately name the learning episodes the formula for action learning can be expanded to:

$$L = (A + S\ (P + Q))\ R$$

where L = learning, A = awareness, S = sense making, P = programmed knowledge, Q = questioning insight and R = reflection. In this notation the problem naming (awareness and sense making) are placed as a necessary precursor to the learning and the reflection is seen as a meta-skill outside of the formulae. In addition, this learning process is placed within the on-going flux of organisational life as shown overleaf in figure 29.

L = Learning;

A = Awareness (Recognition);

S = Sense-making;

P = Programmed Knowledge;

Q = Questioning Insight

R = Reflection

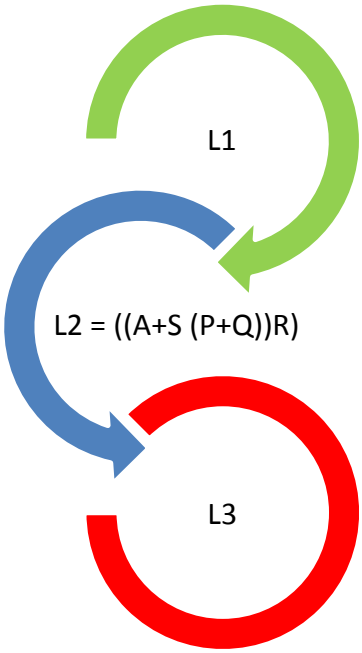


Figure 29: Revised Action Learning Formulae

Source: author

In summary, this representation of action learning seeks to provide a more holistic view of the process. It views learning as being embedded in the history and possible futures of an individual (or organisation). In addition, it sees recognition (the diverging phase) to be important to the processes of questioning and programmed knowledge. A further elaboration is the positioning of reflective practice as a meta-process to explore not only the great questions but also the restless themes. This holistic view of action learning is a core element of my practice and how I seek to engage the MSc in Project Management students in their on-going learning journey.

In the next section I will focus on some of the key steps that lie behind this process. This inquiry will challenge my current practice and seek to make some of the nuances of my practice more explicit as well as revitalise some of the lost opportunities.

5.4 The Components of Action Learning

The process of action learning, as expressed by the various formulae in Section 5.3 has been developed as practitioners and researchers seek to operationalize action learning. Marquardt (2004) identifies the core components of action learning as being the problem, the group, the questions, the coach and a commitment to learning. These elements are considered below in respect to how these are or could be deployed within my professional practice.

5.4.1 The Problem

The efficacy of deploying action learning as a way of inquiry into (and learning from) 'real problems' is attested to by Schön, (1983), Argyris (1991), Marquardt (2004), Raelin (2008) and Reynolds & Vince (2004). Revans's belief was that by addressing problems that are of significance to

the people presenting them the participant would learn not only about the content but also about themselves. Revans saw action learning as an approach for solving or at least gaining insight into problems rather than puzzles. He saw problems as lying outside the space of technical experts in a zone where “honest and reasonable men may well disagree” on the solution (1981 p.11). As such he viewed action learning as a way “to excite the interest of the participants in what they cannot see rather than enhance their skill in elaborating what they can see already” (1980, p. 292).

In considering my practice on the MSc in Project Management I seek to provide rich learning opportunities by creating projects that are located outside of the “Painting by Numbers” (Obeng 1994) learning space. By placing projects outside the students’ collective area of expertise I want to provide them with a richer context for the learning at a profoundly personal level. However, this challenge is not one that is faced by individuals working on their own but rather in the community of “comrades in adversity” (Revans 1982, p.702).

5.4.2 The Group

Revans (9182) stresses that in order to give the richest possible insight, members of an action learning group should be selected from across the organisation. This mix of perspectives helps explore the situation from different angles and offer significant insights not only to resolving the situation, but also providing personal learning from (and through) the situation.

In the MSc in Project Management there are a number of different factors that contribute to this diversity including the educational backgrounds, the ethnic, gender and age profiles of the students and the professional

experiences the students bring to the course. This breadth of experience provides 'expert' knowledge on the problem as well as creating an environment to explore and challenge the existing knowledge and assumptions. Revans asserts that this ability to examine experience from a different perspective is critical to the process of action learning claiming that "there could be no action learning for Robinson Crusoe until Man Friday came along to leave his footprint on their emotional sands. Only with a companion from a totally different culture, to question his motives, to repudiate his assumptions and to search his conscience, does the castaway come to realise who he is …" (1981 p.14).

The action learning group also serves as an important social context for learning. Holman et al (1997) assert that learning is a "responsive, rhetorical and argumentative process that has its origins in relationships with others" (p. 143). They claim that learning cannot be located in a decontextualized and individual form but is at its heart a social and dialogical process. Berggren & Söderlund (2008) argue that having social learning spaces is crucial for the development of practitioners. This "social twist" (ibid) provides a space for vocalisation and articulation of learning which "prepares the mental ground for abstract conceptualisation but also, and perhaps more importantly, it is a means to make experience inter-subjectively accessible" (ibid p. 289).

In considering the way the MSc in Project Management had been structured prior to me resuming the role of programme director I am conscious that, whilst we may have had the necessary ingredients, we had not explicitly created the social space for dialogue and learning. This challenge has been addressed in the current cohort through the creation of guest speaker slots with contributions from industry practitioners, the re-

introduction of formal learning sets and the introduction of open space conferences.

5.4.3 The Questions

Whilst the action learning set is immersed within a significant problem it cannot afford to be swept away by the urgency of the problem, that is to say, purely to focus on the visible task at hand to the exclusion of the learning process itself. It is crucial that the participants are able to step away from the action and regard the questions as a 'problem' rather than a 'puzzle'. This perspective opens up the possibility of an inquiry into the assumptions and preconceptions they bring to the situation. At the heart of this inquiry into the 'Why?' is the curiosity of the action learning set members and their ability to inquire into the situation.

This ability to be curious about the situation and the way in which their assumptions and actions may create a space whereby the learners have become part of the problem situation, and also the problem situation is part of themselves, is fundamental to the transformation from an intuitive or appetitive process of trial and error into one of deliberately exploring the conundrums of practice and identifying possible courses of action. Central to this is the questioning that the action learning set uses to explore the situation, the assumptions and the possible futures.

Weinstein (1995) identifies various types of questioning strategies that may be deployed to explore our understanding, insights and options. These range from fact finding questions through to questions that seek to connect the moment under scrutiny with other experiences or questions that similarly explore fundamental assumptions. By engaging in a questioning strategy the focus is placed on helping the person who brings

the topic under investigation in coming to their own understanding and answers. The questioning converts the learning set from being an empathetic collective ("I can understand your dilemma …") or directive committee ("You should do this …") into a diverse group of curious comrades. These "comrades in adversity" (Revans 1982, p.702) help to provide the insights for critical appreciation and transformational learning. However, whilst they provide a context and environment for learning, the responsibility remains with the presenter.

Providing a learning space where the students can develop the confidence to ask exploratory rather than judgemental questions and to have the trust in each other to respond is a key challenge on the MSc in Project Management. These challenges are reinforced by the apparently 'unnatural' level of time it takes to inquire at a significant level about a moment of practice. Over recent years various formats have been used to encourage this curiosity, from facilitated learning sets, self-directed learning sets through to 'buddy' paired working.

5.4.4 The Power and Commitment to Take Action

The process of action learning becomes a significant learning process only when the participants have the power to take action. However, our ability to take relatively small steps to increase the self-efficacy of our professional performance is connected to our motivation, our self-schema, the support we receive, as well as the context we are working in.

Within the MSc in Project Management the students are encouraged to write assignments that focus on their practice, leading to small steps to enhance their self-efficacy as project management professionals. This context provides a direction and incentive for the engagement in action

learning as a developmental process and translates the assignments from cold academic treatments that talk about something to dynamic inquiries into professional practice.

The engagement in action learning is the start of a journey for the students. Being aware of this and appreciating that the course may only provide the first steps in a journey that will last a life time provides a context for my practice, together with an appreciation that the learning may be the starting point of a learning journey leading to ”conscientization” (Freire (1973) and deeper premise reflection (Mezirow 1991). Consequently, it appears to me that the critical aspect of this is that the individual is supported in their desire to engage up to the level that they are comfortable working at, but that they are also encouraged to develop their appreciation of the possibilities available to them to initiate changes at a more significant level, for example questioning the why’s as well as the how’s.

5.4.5 The Coach

Marquardt (2004) regards the learning set coach as a crucial ingredient; one that assists the group to move away from a task orientated agenda and into a learning space. This role may be filled by one of the set members or could be an external agent brought into the meeting on an ad-hoc or permanent basis.

The roles that the coach takes on may include acting as a process consultant, encouraging people to be curious and ask appropriate questions that seek to explore the issue. Similarly, the coach may also be a logistician, allocating and managing time to different presenters or perhaps a champion to hold the learning space. Wadsworth (1997, 2001) develops

an appreciation of the process consultant role into four separate styles of intervention. She names these roles through the metaphors of map, compass, mirror and magnifying glass.

Working in the role of 'map' the coach provides an overview of the learning set process. They may initiate the learning set and guide members through a process of identifying potential pitfalls or opportunities the learning set may offer. Once the learning set is initiated they can then focus the set's attention on their progress to date and how they are preparing to take the next steps to develop their practice. An alternative perspective on the role of the coach working in the role of a 'map' is provided by Clarke et al (2006) who see a variant of the mapping role for the coach as that of learning historian capturing the emerging process and learning of the set over a series of meetings. A learning historian allows the group to recognise and appreciate developing practice.

Whilst the 'map' provides an overview of the territory for the action learning set, the compass sets direction of travel. In this role the coach supports the initial shaping, conceptualisation and direction of the inquiry. By stepping away from the specific questions the coach is able to remain focussed on the progress to the desired goal and to support this journey through the summary of steps made so far and by assisting group members to formulate new questions which are the next steps.

These two direction setting roles are supplemented by two further roles that assist learning set members to structure their inquiry. In the mode of 'mirror' the coach facilitates a reflective engagement in the issue. This practice focusses on the use of questions to uncover the essence of an incident and to explore possibilities for future rounds of practice. These questions may also offer insights into the roles that participants see

themselves and others play and to explore the social as well as the systematic arenas of practice. An alternative strategy whilst working in the mode of the mirror is to hold it up to the ”reflecting team” (Andersen 1990). Hornstrup et al (2008) assert that the different positions that the reflecting team can assume as a support team, an idea-generation team or a dialogue orientated team open up different lines of inquiry and insight.

The insights offered by the mirror may lead to a specific and more focussed inquiry. In the role of ‘magnifying glass’ the coach is directing inquiry through the facilitation of a deeper level of reflection. This could develop the inquiry from a single loop investigation into a double (or triple) loop engagement (Argyris & Schön 1978). By exploring the factors that condition our natural response, the double inquiry allows the presenter to gain insight into the manner in which their self-schema influences their practice thereby opening up the possibility of learning and change.

On the MSc in Project Management the role of the coach is one that requires further development. As mentioned above various models of coaching support have been provided on the programme. The dilemma for practice is having the basis of a systemic practice for the facilitation of the learning sets without the rigidity of a systematic practice. By this I mean that the process and practice of the coach needs to be guided by a dialogical process rather than the learning set being driven by an ‘x’ step or prescriptive model.

5.5 Critical Action Learning

Within the context of the MSc in Project Management the core components of action learning seek to provide a framework for investigating managerial actions and offering insights into future effective practice. Rigg & Trehan (2004) develop

the insights offered by this traditional approach to action learning by applying a critical management lens in order to "present and command an alternative to the seeming neutrality and authority of orthodox management theory as a means of opening up and facilitating a transformation of management practice" (Wilmott 1997 p. 169 cited in Rigg & Trehan 2004 p. 149).

Drawing on Reynold's (1997) distinction between content radical and process radical, Rigg & Trehan (2004) promote the benefit of a critical inquiry that casts light on the process (rather than content) of practice. Through an inquiry into the power dimensions of their practice, the structural constraints of the project context or the privileging of the project client (or manager) over other stakeholders, the students may be able to draw insight into the subtext of their practice. McLaughlin & Thorpe assert that such a perspective not only allows for greater personal insight but provides a framework for appreciating more fully the "primacy of politics, both macro and micro, and the influence of power on decision making and non-decision making, not to mention the 'mobilization of bias'" (1993 p.25).

The critical action learning approach combines a practice based inquiry with theory that debunks conventional management wisdom (e.g. Willmott & Alvesson, 1992, 2012; Burrell, 1997, Hodgson & Cicmil, 2006). A key element of this conventional wisdom that needs to be broken is a belief in a universality of theory and the assumption that teacher 'knows best'. In its place comes a supportive community of learners who seek to raise their own and each other's awareness to the constraints of traditional practice as well as the possibilities that lie in their future practice.

In the MSc in Project Management this ability to become critical action learners is embedded in the practice (and assessment) of the programme. By placing an emphasis on developing an appreciation of process (rather than task) and seeing

their actions in a dynamic web of relationships, the students have the potential to develop their practice at a sustainable level. However, experience has illustrated that a person centred approach to inquiry is a more realistic one to pursue on the MSc course, although there are two hurdles to overcome. The first is the transformation of experience into future practice through an engagement in a synthesis of reflection and academic inquiry and the second is the ability to engage in this practice at a structural level.

5.6 Taking this Forward

In considering these elements of an action learning process I am drawn to the way in which action learning has been diluted in my practice and the MSc in Project Management as a whole. Whilst there are still 'real problems' to answer and a diverse group of individuals are drawn together to engage in the learning process, other elements appear to be now left to chance.

Whereas previous cohorts had a formal introduction to the action learning process (prior to their dissertations) and formal support during the summer dissertation projects, these had largely been dropped in the period when I was no longer programme director. Therefore the current situation (Cohort 9, August 2012) is akin to the footsteps in the sand and the "Trust the process" experience of my early days. It would appear that, either purposefully or accidentally, the 'theory in action' is one of a loose allegiance to a process of action learning rather than a deliberate engagement in a key strategy.

To further understand this disconnection I undertook an inquiry into the role of action learning in the new course. This analysis is based on Rimancozy (2005, 2007) who provides analysis of 17 common elements in action learning. The key purpose in doing this was to identify opportunities for enhancing practice on the

new MSc in Project Management (October 2012). The key findings are presented in table 6, below.

Element from Rimancozy (2005, 2007)	Considerations for future practice
Taking ownership for one's learning	• Focus on the course as 'apprenticeship' to practice. • Provide greater flexibility and choice in the assignment topics thereby allowing students to focus on one the elements of the 'action' that really matter to them.
Just in time intervention (wait until a learner is ready to ask or asking for a concept)	• This is a challenging area within the context of an academic course. The core theory will be provided within the 'programmed knowledge' section of the modules but the students will be expected to develop this through independent research and practice development. This work should be developed in the moment (i.e. as a live development of practical knowledge) rather than as a cold / abstract relaying of theory.
Linking (transferring learning to other scenarios)	• Provide a structure for an integrating learning journal that creates an on-going narrative of the students' journey (e.g. linking one module into the others). • Support this transfer through the use of action learning sets that sit outside a single module.
Balance task / learning (to give equal attention to progress on task and to the learning)	• Focus assignment structures on the delivery of a specified task (assignment) as well as consideration of 'how to' for future assignments.
Questioning	• Provide an introduction and additional resources on the practice of questioning (at a reflective, reflexive and organisational analysis level). • Model questioning to the students in formal and informal settings (e.g. Socratic questioning in the review of project deliverables, coaching questioning in personal 'one to one' sessions).
Guided reflection	• Develop a range of approaches to reflection as part of the Handbook for Professional Practice. • To provide a structure for the action learning set groups.

Element from Rimancozy (2005, 2007)	Considerations for future practice
Feedback (providing opportunities for giving and receiving feedback)	• To incorporate guidance on effective feedback as part of the 'preparatory' module. • To elicit peer to peer feedback from the students at the end of each practicum.
Unfamiliar environments (to create learning situations that can generate reflection and uncover their own mental models)	• To position the learning practicums in a range of professional contexts. This will partly be to present the breadth of environments where project management can be deployed as well as providing for the "lost in the fog" or "quest" type of projects (Obeng, 1994) that require the students to deliberately focus on the learning process.
Exchange of learning (to generate situations where learners can exchange their perspectives)	• To focus on group practicum. • To create learning conferences for the sharing of learning across modules / groups. • To facilitate open space meetings for the sharing of learning across modules / groups.
Appreciative approach	• Transform my marking approach to ensure a balance. To shift from a forensic deficit approach to one that draws attention to significant strengths as well as the learning opportunities. • Encourage positive feedback within the cohort of peers strengths and contributions.
Safe environments (learners feel free to speak up, express themselves and try out new behaviours)	• The course is intended to be a safe environment to develop professional practice. However, there is a natural tension between the safe environment and the rigors of assessment. • The tension is amplified by the constraints of a UK marking system which sees 70% as a 'distinctive' mark and 80% as a truly exceptional mark (as a significant number of the students are drawn from, and seek to enter back into, a context where 70% is unacceptable).
Holistic involvement (learners express themselves intellectually, emotionally and spiritually)	• Retain the head/hand/heart ethos of learning • Provide space within the academic assignments to focus on a holistic appreciation of personal practice. • To encourage the holistic rather than the tactical learning (e.g. movement towards learning episodes rather than critical incidents)

Element from Rimancozy (2005, 2007)	Considerations for future practice
Learning and personality styles (to have learning activities designed to accommodate the preferences of all learners)	• To provide an introduction to this through two initial perspectives (Honey learning styles (2006) and Myers Briggs Personality Type Index) during the part of the preparatory module. • Develop this awareness through further resources. • Present complex practicums that provide for a range of activities; that play to different strengths (& learning opportunities) • Focus reflective sessions on the roles that people play and the interplay between experimentation, learning and professional development
Coaching one on one support	• To provide opportunity for students to access one to one coaching sessions at key points in the programme. • To encourage peer coaching through the provision of a foundation method (e.g. GROW model) and supporting toolkit.
Sequenced learning (to provide the opportunity to try out concepts, tools and behaviours between meetings)	• To structure the practicum. • To focus attention on these practicums by adopting a short fat schedule (i.e. only one or two modules running at any time). • The initial one will be relatively straightforward and supported by the tutors. Further iterations are more complicated (e.g. introduction of more themes and real clients) and 'the reigns' will be loosened, culminating in the dissertation. • To place 'fire break' weeks between practicums to focus on sense-making and practice development. • Dissertations will typically require negotiation on the scope, the deployment of effective project management processes and for the teams to really work in teams.
Learning coach	• Run formal action learning set groups with a tutor / learning coach. • To encourage additional action learning groups to be run (to support specific assignments) and for these to be supported by a student learning coach. • Introduction of a learning historian (Clarke et al 2006) to capture the long term development.

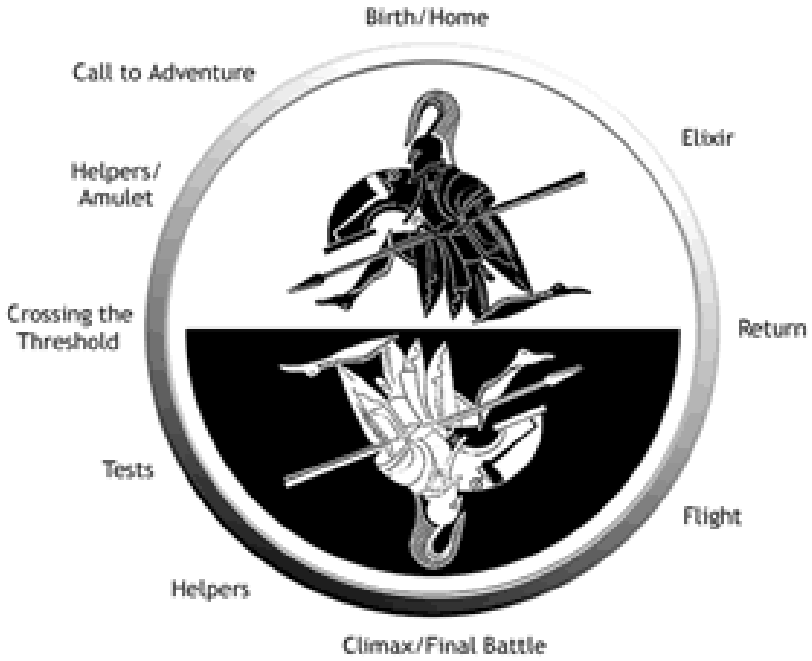
Element from Rimancozy (2005, 2007)	Considerations for future practice
Five system levels: business, organization, team, professional and personal	• Introduce different thematic arenas for reflection based on the five levels of action plus the framework developed for the empirical research (Roffey-Barentsen & Malthouse 2009).

Table 6: Rimancozy (2007) Seventeen Common Elements of Action Learning and their Deployment within the MSc in Project Management

This chapter has revisited the foundations of action learning. In my living inquiry into the deployment of action learning in my practice I have identified that whilst the aspiration is present, the explicit practice has been eroded by organisational imperatives as well as a lack of rigour in my personal practice. This has served as a line-in-the-sand and a moment to account for the future practice against Rimancozy's (2007) elements of effective action learning.

CHAPTER 6:

“HELPERS”: REFLECTIVE PRACTICE



6. HELPERS: REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

6.1 Introduction

Alongside SSM, action learning and systemic practice, the art of reflective practice is a corner-stone of my professional practice. Over the years I have found that this practice is one that is easier said than done. Seeking to blend the richness of action learning practicums with the insights of reflective practice has often resulted in an unbalanced output, with action being the dominant party. In this chapter I go back to the grass roots of this practice to understand it afresh. This inquiry will be addressed from a theoretical perspective but also linked into my practice to provide the stimulus for future iterations of enhanced practice.

In this chapter I will do four things. Firstly, I will introduce a key moment where I realised the differing worldview associated with reflective practice. This moment encouraged me to step back and consider in greater detail the way I use reflective practice in the courses I teach. Secondly, I will go back to basics and define reflection and reflective practice. The contrasting definitions bring to the surface some of the key debates in this field, and show how a single term can be appropriated by a wide variety of practitioners each advocating something quite different. Thirdly, I will provide an account of various processes aimed at facilitating effective reflective practice. These processes vary in their degrees of elaboration and offer different affordances to the practitioner. Finally, the fourth section will consider how I transfer the experiences and learning of this chapter into the new MSc in Project Management.

6.2 Reflective Practice: A Difference of Opinion

In the MSc in Project Management the students have the option of undertaking an action learning dissertation during the summer. The action learning is supported by a reflective dissertation that seeks to give an account of the experience and provide insights for future practice. During a supervision meeting one student presented a dramatically different perspective of the value of this process.

> I don't want to do another of those [reflective] assignments where I *have* to show you how *fucking crap* I am at everything!
>
> (Tina, MSc student August 2010)

Tina's emotive language distilled in a few seconds a challenge that I had partially become accustomed to over the years. Namely, the perception that reflective practice is a *deficit* based approach that thrives in the *mea culpa* of the academic confessional ("how crap I am"). Other key aspects that appear to reside in this outburst are that it is primarily done for someone else ("show you") and that it is a mandatory ("have to") end to the process (implicit, in the academic assignment). This statement gave me a stimulus to think more carefully about my practice. Stepping back from this challenge I was left to consider what it was that reflection really means and to question the cult of reflection (Ixer 1999).

6.3 Definitions of Reflection and Reflective Practice:

There are many different interpretations of the aims and processes of reflection and reflective practice. Cole (1977) asserts that the term 'reflection' has been used in so many ways, appearing as a noun, a verb, an adjective, a process, and/or an outcome that it has almost become unusable. In this section I will offer

a range of these definitions in an attempt to understand what I mean when talking to my students about reflection.

At a broad brush level we can see many authors regarding reflection as a natural practice. Donagy & Morss (2007) define it as being "professional thinking", whilst Kottkamp (1990) sees it as the analysis of one's action with a goal of improving one's professional practice. These general definitions are developed by Schön's view that reflection is an evolving "dialogue of thinking and doing through which I become more skilful" (1987, p. 31). This appreciative process is further defined by Ixer as a place where the "professional is able to think about his or her own thought processes, as an aid and guide to future practice, whilst maintaining this thinking under his or her own critical control" (1999 p. 523). This definition echoes Dewey's call to "active, persistent and careful consideration" (1933 p.9) and an internal dialogue that "enables us to know what we are about when we act. It converts action that is merely appetitive, blind, and impulsive into intelligent action" (1964 p. 211). This notion of reflection as a process used to appreciate our practice and one that initiates deliberate steps towards more effective practice is linked in the business school world with the notion of 'single' and 'double loop' learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978).

Argyris & Schön (1978) view single loop learning as the ability of an individual to apply given conventions or rules to a known (or perceived) problem situation. By understanding where deviations to the standard exist and applying a known 'solution' the organisation can be given equilibrium. This view of learning is a closed loop system and assumes that all the required knowledge is accessible and that the solution can be produced from available resources. A contrasting view, where the rules have to be changed, is presented in their depiction of double loop learning. At this level of learning the individuals are often thinking outside the box to understand the limiting aspects of the rules and why they need to be changed to allow significant progress to take place.

Whilst Ixer's (1999) and Dewey's (1910) definitions offer an insight into the practice of reflection, the impact of this understanding is diminished by the use of the word in everyday language where it seems to be called upon to account for even a momentary consideration of a day's events. Rather than articulating a state of mind when the action-in-the-moment of professional practice can be appreciated and take on new meaning and opportunities, it has become bland and misleading. Even the underlying metaphor of 'reflection' is constraining, residing in a "modernist view that there is an original that we can think about, categorise and explain" (Cunliffe, 2002 p. 38). Bolton also challenges this metaphor in blunt language asserting that "a mirror reflection is merely the image of an object directly in front of it, faithfully reproduced back to front. What is the reflection of shit? Shit'" (Bolton, 2010 p.10).

At another extreme I perceive that the notion of reflection has become overbearing. Bolton advocates the use of reflection as a way of constant critiquing of anything and everything that is taken for granted (2010 p.48). This is echoed by Clouder (2000) who seeks to challenge existing practices in this way. The language used by Clouder and Bolton is more confrontational than Schön's inner dialogue. Developing this further, critical theorists such as Van Manen (1977) have embraced reflection as part of their liberation project. Van Manen's (1977) definition of *critical* reflection focuses on the attainment of equity and justice within wider historical, political and social contexts. Added to these more challenging views of reflection I appreciate that it may appear to be an academic confessional or a process of self-criticism more akin to the Maoist practice of *jiǎntǎo* (检讨), than a process of emancipation.

With this range of opinion on the meaning of reflection and my personal experiences of the difficulty in practising reflection it seems as if it can be represented as one of a number of different practices (see Figure 30, below).

Firstly, it can be seen as a bland practice as shown in the middle image in the triptych. Here the everyday usage of the word fails to take us beyond the basic image and so whilst we claim to be reflecting, in reality we are merely observing the surface level practice. This contrasts with the image on the left which sees reflection as a way of fore-grounding a sense of failure and inadequacy and exposing our practice to the judgement of others. The third perspective views reflective practice as a way of deliberately thinking about the conditions and consequences of personal practice. This inquiry into personal practice goes beyond the surface level inquiry and offers insight into premises that we live our lives by, with a specific aim of enhancing self-efficacy.

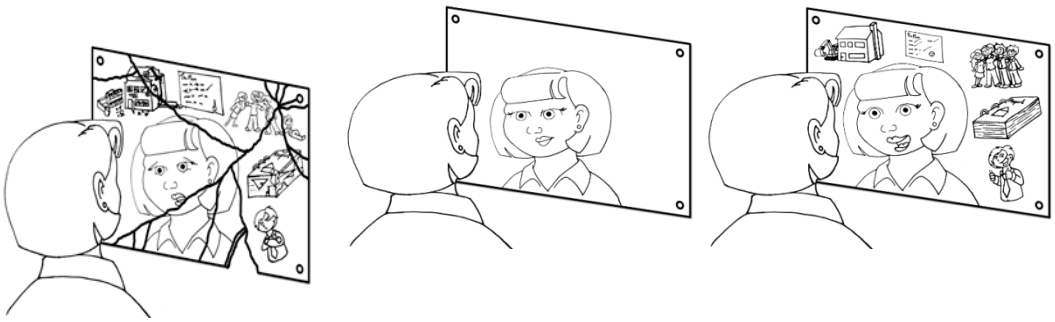


Figure 30: Different Views of Reflection

Source: Graham (2011c)

With these radically different meanings it is not surprising that reflective practice may appear to be an uncomfortable and perplexing process to some and one that is even unhelpful and alien to others (Fowler & Chevannes 1998). In addition, the juxtaposition between Bolton's (2010) metaphor of the bland reproduction of what is in front of us and Van Manen's (1977) critical questioning of social justice made me stop and think about the depth of inquiry that I am asking the students to engage in.

From my perspective reflective practice is a deliberate and on-going inquiry into my professional practice that is informed by different perspectives in order to develop my practice over and above the incremental progression associated with systematic development.

In considering this definition I am conscious that it does not go as far as Van Manen's (1977) critical reflection. However, the engagement with different perspectives provides the range of insights necessary to push development beyond the systematic and invites the students into the dimensions of 'head, hand & heart' that can enhance their self-efficacy and self-confidence to work as part of a professional project management team.

6.4 Processes for Reflective Practice:

In this section I consider how I can continue to support the students' journey to becoming reflective practitioners. The criticality of this task is attested to by Ayas & Zenuik (2001), Jaafari (2003), Crawford et al (2006) and Winter & Smith (2006). However, in my context I see a specific challenge that I want to address. That of helping learners to move their reflective practice out of the (mundane) everyday usage without transforming it into either a tyrannical process of self-criticism (*jiǎntǎo* 检讨) or a counter-revolutionary examination of social structures (Van Manen 1977).

A starting point for this development is to focus on the difference between everyday language and deliberate reflective practice. The Learning and Skills Information Service (LSIS 2010) highlights our everyday reflective language and illustrates how this could be developed into reflective practice by making it a more deliberate process. By expanding conversations with trusted friends about a tough day at work into one that includes a careful consideration of how practices can be developed to overcome the challenges, the step from reflection

to reflective practice is made. In a similar way they highlight how reviewing a workshop could be developed into reflective practice by including specific feedback on how to enhance practice.

Dewey (1910, 1964, 2007) provides insight into reflective practice by articulating four key dispositions that the practitioner needs: being open to new ways of doing (and being); sensing that something is amiss and developing this into a specific area of concern: being able to join this to the patterns of professional life by connecting it to personal history; their past, present and future and having the courage to take a decision to act.

Dewey's approach is focussed on self-efficacy but at its core it appears to be a deficit based approach. It is focussed on a sense of discomfort. This orientation may lead the learner to consider that reflection is about saying "how crap I am" rather than having a more balanced consideration of the opportunities to continually develop their practice. Consequently, expanding this approach to embrace an appreciative inquiry of positive outcomes or role models provides a more balanced and potentially empowering approach to reflective practice. It is also significant that Dewey's approach is grounded in the histories of the learner. By connecting the specific experience to their past and future the reflective practice becomes more than an inquiry on a specific critical incident into their way(s) of being and becoming a project manager.

Dewey's reflective dispositions are supported by a plethora of specific frameworks (Gibbs 1988, Borton 1970, Smyth 1989, Smith & Russell 1991, Burrows 1995, Rolfe et al 2001 and Johns 2004, 2009). The flexibility of these frameworks enables the learner to draw on a contextually appropriate approach rather than be stuck in a rigid practice. Factors such as the complexity of the situation, the familiarity with reflective practice, the resources available and

urgency of identifying a way forward could all contribute to the choice of framework.

An initial investigation or light touch approach could be constructed around the 'What? So What? and What Next?' questions offered by Borton (1970) and Rolfe (2001). This appreciation can be developed further through Gibbs' (1998) reflective model that prompts the practitioner to adopt a holistic stance which explicitly incorporates emotional as well as cognitive aspects of the situation, see Figure 31 below.

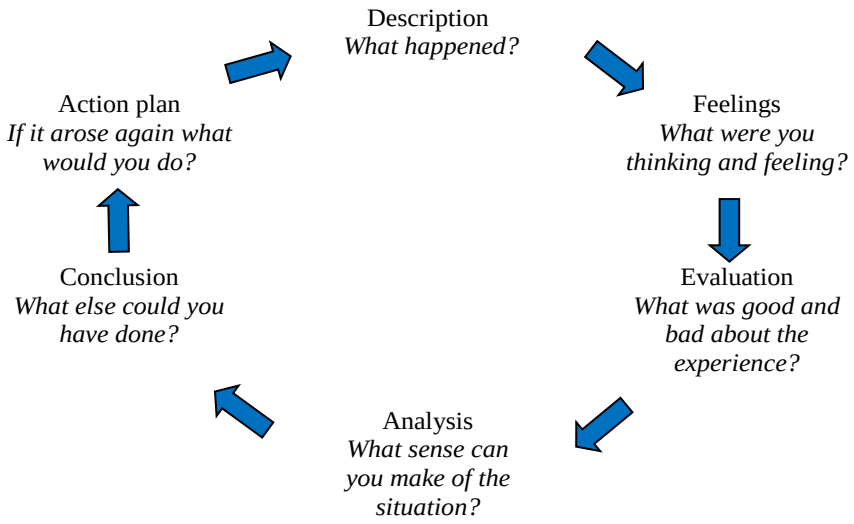


Figure 31; Gibbs Reflective Cycle

Source: Gibbs (1998)

Whilst the Gibbs cycle appears to be the form that most of the students choose to use to develop their reflective practice there are additional insights available from other models. As previously mentioned another popular device is to talk about the reflective cycle in the terms of single and double loop learning opportunities (Argyris & Schön, 1978).

Using the Dewey dispositions (1910. 1964, 2007) and Gibbs cycle (1998) as a way of entering a dialogue about the double loop learning opportunities (Argyris & Schön, 1978) provides a common language for the students to think about and explore reflective practice. This basis for practice can be expanded further through additional lenses that provide specific foci.

Johns (2009 p.65) offers an ethical framework for reflective practice that is based on appreciating the perspectives of the other people involved in the situation. An adapted version of this framework has been introduced within the MSc in Project Management (see Figure 32, below) to provide a degree of structure to reflective conversations between the students.

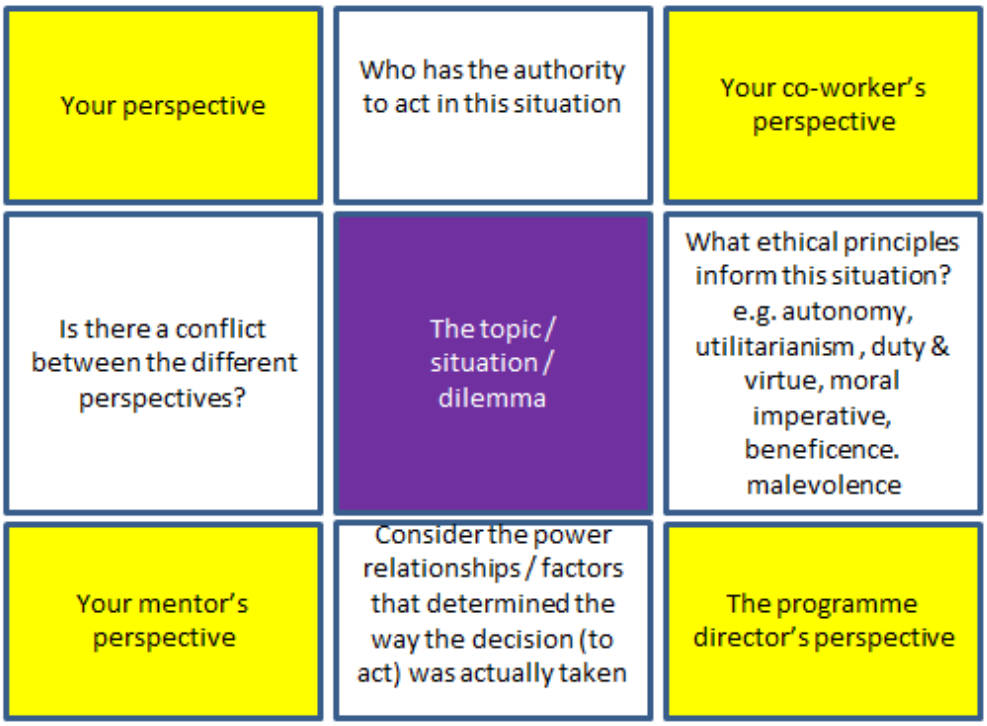


Figure 32: Johns' ethical mapping (modified)

Source: Johns (2009 p. 65)

Further insights can be drawn from Rigg & Trehan's (2004) or Smyth's (1989) frameworks which explicitly consider the inherent power resources and

underlying social structures that influence practice. An alternative approach to digging deeper into the experience is provided by Johns' structured questioning (seeTable7, overleaf) which is more akin to a coaching style of reflection where the hidden depths of the experience are drawn into the light by the use of insightful questioning. The strength of such a process lies in the nuanced consideration of the difference the questions may make rather than a systematic adherence to them.

Johns (2009) model for structured reflection

- Bring the mind home
- Focus on a description of an experience that seems significant in some way
- What issues are significant to pay attention to?
- How do I interpret the way people were feeling and why they felt that way?
- How was I feeling and what made me feel that way?
- What was I trying to achieve and did I respond effectively?
- What were the consequences of my actions on the project (its client and stakeholders), the project team and myself?
- What factors influenced the way I am/was feeling, thinking or responding to this situation?
- What knowledge did or might have informed me?
- To what extent did I act for the best and in tune with my values?
- How does this situation connect with previous experiences?
- How might I respond more effectively given this situation again?
- How might I reframe the situation and respond more effectively given this situation again?
- What could be the consequences of alternative actions for the project (its client and stakeholders), the project team and myself?
- What factors might constrain me responding in new ways?
- How do I NOW feel about this experience?
- Am I more able to support myself and others better as a consequence?
- What insights have I gained?
- Am I more able to realise desirable practice?

Table 7: Johns' (2009) model for structured reflection
Source: Adapted from Johns (2009) p 51

The application of these frameworks can provide rich insight into professional practice. However, they are just one source of insight and could be supplemented by insights from colleagues, theories and perceptions of the other actors in the situation, to stimulate a richer awareness of the possibilities open as well as to avoid the pitfalls of a self-referential account of practice (Brookfield 2002).

The engagement with colleagues and the other actors provides an escape from the solipsism of reflective practice and opens up a dialogical space to explore practice. The benefit of shifting reflective practice from a solitary into a community activity is attested to by Tinsley & Lebak (2009) and Berggren & Söderlund (2008) who assert that a "social twist" to reflective practice provides learners with the opportunity to engage in the co-construction of a deeper understanding of the topic, whilst at the same time providing a public forum to witness (and support) their commitment to future action.

This section has developed an explicit treatment of reflective practice. It has translated the practice from an intuitive one ("Trust the process") into a visible one that is open to discussion and development. In the next section I will consider how this deliberate practice may be drawn further into the work on the MSc in Project Management.

6.5 Drawing Reflective Practice into the MSc in Project Management

In this chapter I have returned to the origins of an intuitive practice and defined it within the context of the MSc in Project Management. In doing so, I have identified and appreciated a number of dispositions and frameworks for its effective deployment.

Translating this into the next steps of practice I am mindful of three key aspects. These are: the systematic support of reflective practice, the social inclusion of reflective practice and the systemic eloquence of reflective practice.

In considering the systematic support I am conscious of the elusiveness of ”trust[ing] the process”. To address this I have drawn together a resource that aims to be a toolkit for reflective practice (see Appendix 6). This toolkit provides insights into the process and frameworks for effective reflective practice. In addition it seeks to provide a compendium that will contain a variety of pragmatic approaches to understand the self, the team and the project. So far this toolkit has been used on 2 cohorts of the MSc in Project Management as well as a number of post graduate courses for part-time students in a variety of contexts from a Middle Eastern telecommunications company to a UK Further Education College and a UK Masters programme in Hospice Leadership.

In considering the efficacy of this toolkit the programme director for the Help the Hospice programme reviewed sixty assignments with the specific aim of evaluating the use of this resource. Identifying that 27 assignments made explicit use of this resource in a variety of ways she went on to explore the insights that the resource offered. Three common areas were identified. The first was that having a structured and systematic approach enabled the students to engage in a new style of writing and a new way of thinking. Secondly, the Gibbs cycle was deployed as a way of legitimising and engaging in a reflective practice that incorporates an emotional as well as cognitive perspective. Thirdly, the toolkit was referred to over the series of assignments and so the students demonstrated a growing awareness of the models and the practice of reflection. Having the resource to call upon in the form of a booklet provided a handy resource for supporting an elusive practice.

Whilst having a systematic approach to reflective practice is identified as being beneficial to the students, this is only part of the story. The second development aligns to the socialisation of reflective practice. By this I mean providing a shared space where the reflective world can be explored through a community of practitioners rather than as a solitary voyage. This community is created partially through a more structured approach to the learning sets but also through a series of open space conferences, which provide the opportunity for practitioners to engage in dialogue with their peers on the topics that matter to them. Therefore rather than having a fixed agenda the participants come along and create it in the moment. They raise the topics that are of importance to them and attend the sessions that they want to.

These conferences are supported by on-going encouragement for a more nuanced engagement in reflective practice. This is the third strand of the change in my practice. By this I mean becoming more visible and vocal in my support and encouragement of the students' engagement. This is primarily seen in four different developments. Firstly, by observing more 'practice' rather than the assignments, I want to witness the actuality of the students' practice as well as draw out exemplars of good practice within the community. Secondly, by creating and supporting dialogical spaces for reflective practice I want to encourage this as a community project rather than as an individual venture. Thirdly, by engaging in more appreciative dialogue in these community forums I want to create a zone of promixal reflection (Tinsley & Lebak, 2009) whereby practising project managers can take part in the reflective sessions offering insights into pragmatic ways forward as well as providing role models for practice. The final element of this nuanced engagement is to create a resource of practice that can support colleagues in the deployment of systemic reflective practice techniques. This initiative is a response to a series of conversations I have had with fellow systemic practitioners, which recall excellent practice that we have

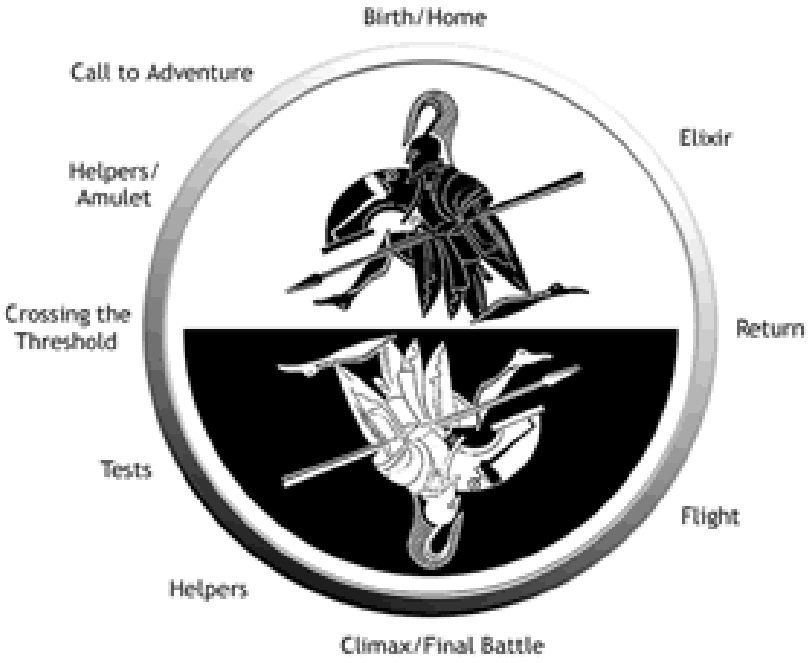
witnessed but cannot find the resources to support the deployment of such activity in a new context.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have revealed my implicit practice and rebuilt it through a consideration of the various definitions of reflection and the creation of my own working definition. The systematic treatment of reflective practice has been supported through the creation of a toolkit for the students, although this is shared with the warning that an x step model is rarely enough to understand the complexities of professional life. To support a richer engagement in reflective practice this chapter draws together some of the social processes that can enrich this art. By socialising reflective practice through learning sets, open space conferences and social media a richer and more insightful community of practitioners can be created.

CHAPTER 7:

“HELPERS”: SYSTEMIC PRACTICE



7. HELPERS: SYSTEMIC PRACTICE

7.1 Introduction

In Chapters four, five and six I have provided an account of three key dimensions to my professional practice namely, SSM, action learning and reflective practice. This chapter develops the account of my living theory by connecting these elements with the values of systemic practice. The specific aspects that it considers are those of the importance of context, the connections between entities, emergence and co-construction.

In contrast to positivistic approaches embedded in mainstream project management systemic management practice may appear to be an elusive and ethereal phenomenon. Therefore this chapter starts with a consideration of the origins and values of this practice and illustrations of my systemic approach are provided throughout the chapter.

7.2 Introduction to Systemic Practice

Mainstream management is infused with positivistic approaches to management that may appear to translate the richest context into an 'either / or' model (typically a 2x2 grid) or to plot action that relies on the systematic application of an 'x step model'. An alternative approach to engaging in the real world of project management is provided by systemic management which talks about the importance of context, connectedness, emergence and co-construction.

The inspiration for this practice is drawn from researchers and practitioners such as Harlene Andersen (1997), Anderson (1990), Bateson (1972, 1979) and Palazzoli et al (1980) who draw on systemic and constructivist ideas in the field of family therapy. Their ideas have created a range of interventions such as communication theory, psychotherapy, attachment focussed family therapy and systemic coaching that articulate the power of communication.

This belief in the power of communication emphasises the role of the practitioner as a "conversational artist who use[s] their colour palette in creative ways according to unique opportunities and constraints of the system" (Barge 2007 p. 31). The notion of a palette of approaches that can be used in a creative way rather than an objective toolkit that is applied in a constrained manner opens up a vast panorama of possibilities for more effective practice. Steering the practice that emerges from this palette are five key values which are: the criticality of understanding the context; the flux of situations that creates an evolving and emergent world; the importance of connections among people; the power of language to create affirmative action; and an appreciation of the relational world that we all inhabit.

7.3 The Importance of Context

The implementation of 'best practice' is often seen in (project) management discourse as a shortcut to excellence. However, whilst I can appreciate the attraction of this belief I shudder when I recall the waste of resources in pursuing these quests. As Bateson (1991) asserts sustainable knowledge can only be gained through an understanding of the context. This context is like the air that a human breathes and if we try to examine project management practice outside

of this context then our findings would be as unsustainable as humans disconnected from our air supply.

The essence of my contextual appreciation is drawn from SSM which has helped me to think about the importance of “messy problem situations” (Checkland, 1981) rather than specific unambiguous problems. Consequently any analysis of a messy problem situation embraces the cultural, political, social and relational world as well as the systematic content. This foundation has been developed through a growing confidence to be curious and to inquire into the context of problem situations rather than accepting them as given.

This appreciation of context may be seen in my practice through the ability to accommodate conflicting demands. These demands may emerge from the students’ experiences and aspirations, future employers’ expectations, Quality Assurance Agency regulations, tutor preferences and university constraints. Through an appreciation of these contextual factors (as illustrated in Figure 33, overleaf) I have been able to create, direct and recover a sustainable programme.

In considering these various perspectives of context I am aware of a dynamic systemic “ecology” rather than a static hard system (Bateson, 1972). This ecology is infused with synergy but also dissonance and gives rise to a wealth of possibilities. As a practitioner I need to be engaged enough in the nuances of these contexts to be aware of the possibilities and to use these resources to enhance the quality of students’ experience and the ethical nature of my practice.

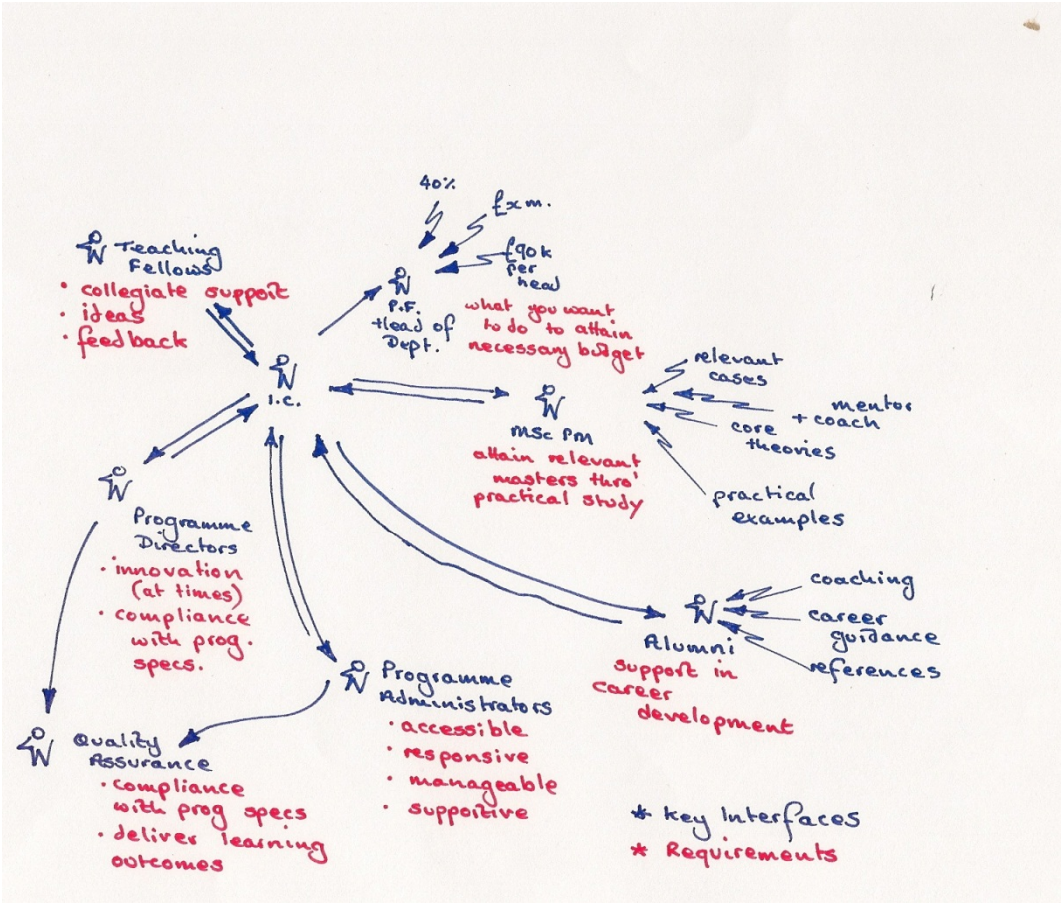


Figure 33: The Context of My Practice

Source: author

7.4 The Importance of Connections

As previously mentioned SSM provides a conceptual framework for appreciating 'messy problem' situations (Checkland 1981, 2000, Checkland & Scholes, 1990, Checkland & Poulter, 2006). This approach allows the practitioner to engage with the complexity of a problem situation without being over whelmed by it. A key component of this framework is to model the connections between different elements of the system.

Whilst SSM provided me with a systematic toolkit to represent the connections of situations, systemic practice has encouraged me to be more active in creating these connections in my practice. As I have developed my practice I have come to see these connections as empowering and a source of significant learning.

On reflection I can see four different styles of connection that I endeavour to make in my practice. The first is to try to infuse the delivery of the programme with the practice of project management. In this respect I see the course as a practice based MSc comprised of a series of practicum that do not differentiate between academic and practical knowledge. Appendix 1 provides an overview of the current cohort (MSc in Project Management cohort 10) and discusses the nature of the core content and the practicum.

In seeking to connect the course with practice I am also creating a space for the students to consider their future practice. McAdam & Lang (2009) describe how a process of ”dream talk” connects our perception of our future practice with our current practice. In this process they develop Dewey’s metaphor of future thinking by describing how an archer’s future goal, the bulls-eye, informs their present stance, breathing and aim. So by placing practicum throughout the course and encouraging the students to engage in them as practitioners I am creating a space for them to develop their future and current practices simultaneously.

The second element of connection that I have developed in my practice is in my connection with the students. In the tipping point I illustrated a connection with the class that was solely focused on being an information provider who was offering a systematic toolkit. However, over the years I have developed my appreciation of the various roles and connections that I want to have with the

students. My practice is the network of relationships that I have with them. Figure 34, below shows these various roles and illustrates how much richer the practice is from being just a content provider. This extended network of relationships is who I am and what I mean. I see clear roles as a mentor / coach to the practice of project management, a facilitator in the deployment of the art of project management, a role model for its practice as well as the formal roles of content provider and knowledge assessor. This richness allows me to connect in a more sustainable way with the students and to develop their practice through these connections.

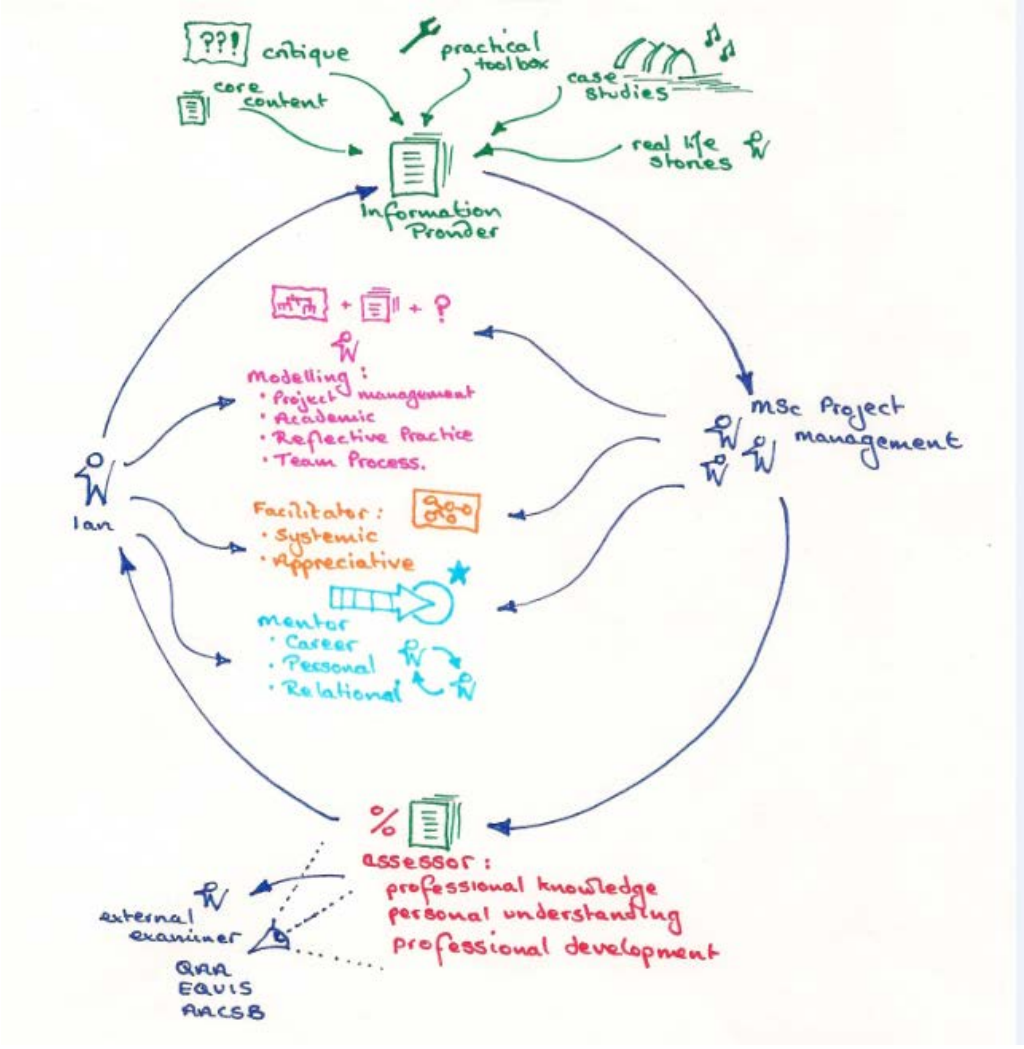


Figure 34: A Plethora of Roles

Source: author

The third connection looks to broaden the engagement that I initially have into one that continues after the course has finished. The empirical research included in this thesis illustrates the importance of this connection. By appreciating the journey that the students make beyond the course, I can continue to refine the content of the programme and further understand the contexts where this knowledge is practised. An additional benefit of this connection is to provide a rich source of experiences that the current students can engage in including practitioner presentations, mentoring and action learning projects.

The fourth connection is with myself. By seeing myself as a person I need to remain connected to, I am alluding to a tendency to be too focused on completing the task and often suppressing my personal needs. This has led to significant stress (particularly when I was working in industry). By seeking to stay connected to how I am feeling on a moment to moment basis I am striving to orientate myself to the present moment with the aim of developing a sustainable practice. This mindful approach is translating significant learning moments into a strategy for everyday action. As part of this practice I am now regularly keeping my learning journal and reflecting on the ordinary rather than the extra-ordinary.

By appreciating the connections between theory and practice, the students, my various roles, the alumni, the course and myself I am able to sustain my practice and to keep it grounded in the actualities of education, management and mindfulness.

7.5 Emergence

The concept of the whole system and its decomposition into parts is a core concept of systems theory. In the positivistic realm of (project) management the belief that a problem can be isolated from its environment, decomposed into its constituent parts, analysed and subsequently solved is embedded into professional practice. This is seen in the rational tools of the Work Breakdown Structure, Organisational Breakdown Structure etc. and in the consultants' language of synergy. However, as the saying goes "when you cut a plum in half you lose some of the juice", conversely when elements of a complex social system are brought together the result is more than the sum of its parts; a system has an emergent property.

The emergent property is a feature of the system as a whole rather than it being the property of any individual component. Goldstein (1999) identifies the core characteristics of an emergent property as its dynamic emergence from the system, its novelty (i.e. it is emergent from the interactions of the parts rather than being the property of a single component), its persistence and its ability to be perceived. This notion of emergence may be seen in each of the ten cohorts of the MSc in Project Management. For example, whilst each cohort has recruited between twenty eight to thirty one students typically drawn from around eleven different countries, there has been a significant difference in the style or flavour of each cohort. One cohort was truly interconnected at a social, emotional and intellectual level, another seemed to exude anxiety whilst a third cohort embraced reflective practice. These unique flavours of the course and their emergent properties are the subtle differences between the cohorts that make each of them a unique challenge for my engaged practice.

Once again SSM has provided me with an intellectual tool for talking about an external world. This appreciation is developed through a systemic perspective into a way of being; appreciating that fundamentally I am part of the system that creates the emergent property rather than the observer of an external system. A systemic perspective helps me to appreciate that "We live our lives like chips in a kaleidoscope, always part of patterns that are larger than ourselves and somehow more than the sum of their parts" (Minuchin 1986, p. 3). By appreciating myself as part of this system and valuing the community that I am practising in I work to co-create the context and the atmosphere that may give rise to positive emergent properties. The key to this influence is the relational work at the heart of my practice.

7.6 Living in a Relational World

Whilst SSM provides me with a conceptual framework to analyse the world, the practices of systemic thinking allow me to more purposefully enter this world. The systemic approaches encourage me to leave the "high ground of professional practice" (Schöm, 1987) and enter the "swampy lowlands" (ibid) by valuing the complexity of the local context and knowledge of the participants. This shift in position can be seen in the ways in which I seek to co-create an understanding of the world that project management resides in and to develop this understanding through the power of communication.

Dewey (2997), Maturana (1985) and McAdam & Lang (2009) all attest to the power of language to create rather than merely describe our world. In seeking to co-create a learning community with the students on the MSc I start the year off with an exploration of our experiences of education facilitated by Germain's photo-essay (2012), see Figure 35 below. This introduction to the different styles

of education leads to an appreciative inquiry into the types of activity that the students draw most benefit from, and a dialogue about how these aspects can be woven into the course.

Figure 35: Classrooms of the World

Source: Germain (2012)

Other dialogical approaches that are encouraged in my practice include the role of storytelling and the value of a curious question. Perhaps it is part of my educational background as a historian that values the art of story-telling as it has always been part of my practice. I remember in the early days of my teaching practice when I sought to connect the mechanics of project management with illuminating stories from history or the contemporary news. It seemed that by turning a technique into a human narrative the experience for the students was transformed and this is something that I have continued do. The stories I weave into the course are those of experienced practitioners who come to share their experiences with the students. However, rather than providing a straightforward narrative I seek to create events whereby the students engage in the story, exploring opportunities and different possible outcomes. An example of this

practice was when I had two experienced project directors from the NHS talking about recent projects that they had done. The first story was that of a project that no-one wanted, a revised car parking policy that would see the number of allocated staff spaces being reduced. The tension of this story was matched by the story of the project that no one could speak about. This second project was minor surgery to a member of a royal family that needed to be completed in absolute secrecy. By exploring the similarities and differences between these projects and engaging in dialogue with the directors about the nuances of practice, the students were able to gain significant insight.

The art of storytelling develops in the course through the style of assignments that the students are creating. Their reflective assignments provide evidence of practice and academic analysis of their desire to enhance practice. However, in addition to these academic outcomes they are also creating the "dream talk" (McAdam & Lang, 2009) of their future actions. By creating an assignment that explores a unique and complex personal situation in order to develop a sustainable course for future action, the students become practical authors (Cunliffe 2002). The art of this authorship offers a way to break through the rigid domain of purely academic theory into a wider vista of pragmatic discourse of practice. These new discourses focus on a way of being in a complex and dynamic world and provide a way of co-creating meaning through the engagement with a broad network of actors in order to understand professional practice.

These steps in developing a relational appreciation of the world of education and project management are supported by an orientation towards curiosity. By placing myself in a curious stance rather than an inflexible authoritative one I am trying to create a space between the students and myself for the co-creation of an exceptional course rather than the delivery of a standard one. As well as

becoming curious about the opportunities available to us and engaging in dialogue about how to realise these dreams there is the opportunity to develop our understanding of different perspectives. This new level of understanding helps to challenge our assumptions and to create a new ecology of thinking. In this space we are all learners; some of us are choosing to learn about project management and some of us are learning about the education of project management specialists but there is no automatic privilege of rank.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter has considered the way that systemic practice has developed my practice. The specific changes that I see in my practice now, compared to the moment of the tipping point, are aligned with a journey beyond the systematic understanding of the world as understood through the language of SSM and into a way of *being* with the world.

This new stance is difficult to objectify because of the very nature of the practice that emerges from the subtle nuances of the individual context. However, the key principles that I am embracing in this practice are: an awareness of context and the interconnectedness of the social world; the perception that I am part of a kaleidoscope of emergent properties and a belief in the power of communication to co-create the world that we live in.

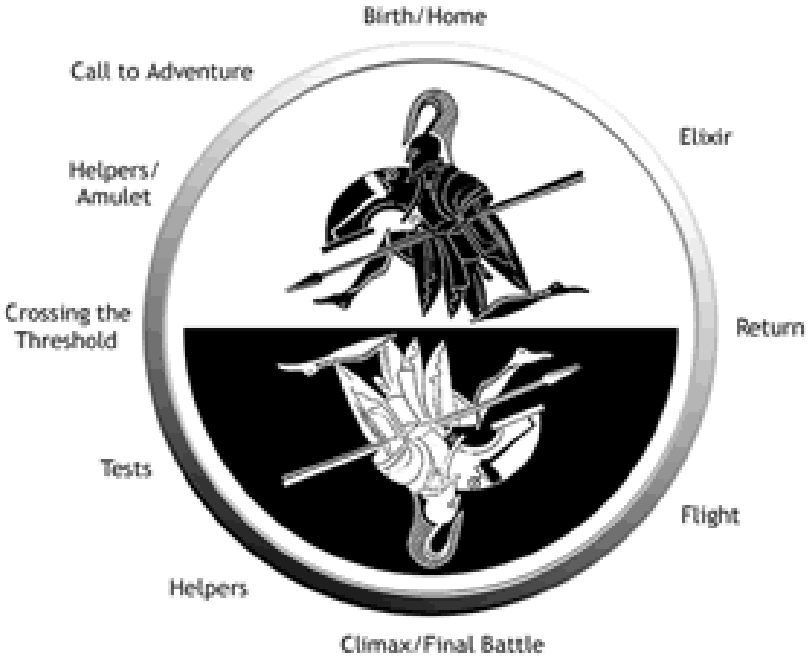
This chapter forms part of a broader section which reviews my living theory. These different approaches help me to ground my practice in a systemic world and assist me to create opportunities for the students to become project managers.

In the next stage of the thesis I will explore their reality through an analysis of dissertations and interviews in order to develop a rich understanding of what this journey means to them.

Figure 36: Successful Project Management Practice
Source: Graham (2011d)

CHAPTER 8:

“CLIMAX”: BECOMING A PROJECT MANAGER



8. "CLIMAX" : RESEARCH FINDINGS ON 'BECOMING A PROJECT MANAGER'

8.1 Introduction

To develop an external perspective of my work as a teaching fellow I undertook three specific inquiries to appreciate the students' journeys as they went from the consumers of academic accounts of project management, whilst on the course, to producers of project management practice into their professional worlds. This journey of becoming a project manager represents for students the climax of their studies. Understanding this journey has an ethical imperative for my practice because *it is* the reason for my practice. By this I mean that I see my key role as providing an educational space to facilitate the development of their careers and without this imperative my practice, in my view, becomes esoteric. Developing a richer understanding of the worlds that the students inhabit, an awareness of the challenges they face, and an appreciation of what is important to them, offers me insights that I can bring back to my teaching practice delivering the MSc in Project Management. In addition, this understanding will provide me with an evaluation of the contribution that systemic practice may provide to the process of becoming a project manager.

The three inquiries explore the different dimensions of the students' practice. In the first inquiry I examine the dissertations of 103 students and look at the key words they use to describe their key learning experiences during their summer action learning project. This sample from all of the dissertations submitted in the last four years provides a broad and accessible insight into what is important to the students as they reflect on their first experience of working as a project manager.

The second level of inquiry looks in greater depth at the critical incidents explored within thirty four dissertations. This sample of dissertations is drawn from all nine years of the MSc in Project Management programme and goes beyond the key words used, in order to understand more about the context of the specific learning experiences. It does so by mapping them against dimensions of reflection (Roffey-Barentsen & Malthouse, 2009), and depth of reflection (Houtzagers, 1999). This investigation provides insight into the key stories of emerging practice and how the students make sense of their experiences.

The third level of inquiry engages in greater depth, looking into the actuality of the practice of the MSc in Project Management alumni by listening to their stories from the field. In this inquiry I interviewed ten practising project managers who were alumni of the course and had graduated two to four years previously. Their accounts of practice go beyond the constraints of working on an academic dissertation and the temporal constraints of the project, with a need to interweave practice and theory or satisfy the desire to appease supervisors, to explore what they see as being the key moments when they felt they *really* were project managers. The three levels of inquiry and the key themes revealed are represented below in Table 8, overleaf.

	Inquiry		
	1: Key Words	2. Critical Incidents	3. Stories from the Field
Size	103 dissertations	110 critical incidents	Ten interviews
Nature of Inquiry	Descriptive (broad)	Analytical (broad)	Analytical (narrow)
Key Themes	1. Systemic nature of practice that focuses on aspects such as stakeholders / teams. 2. Contrast to the formal bodies of knowledge focus on process and product	3. The primary focus on the specific (individual) incident. 4. The focus on the deficit based approach to developing professional capacity. 5. The focus on the systemic nature of project management (relationships, roles and communications)	6. The personal and unique journey to becoming a project manager. 7. The systemic nature of project management. 8. The role of the project manager as an artisan, ambassador, politician and champion

Table 8 Overview of the three levels of inquiry

These three levels of inquiry provide a tapestry of experiences. Whilst they are operating at different levels of inquiry: from a descriptive inquiry into the words used to recount experiences through to an analytical inquiry into the actuality of the real worlds of project management, they are able to breathe life into my teaching practice.

8.2 Findings: Key Words

The first level of inquiry produced the following five world clouds. Figure 37 provides a visual depiction of the frequency of words in Cohorts five to eight. Figures 38 - 41 show the word clouds for each cohort. Combined with these word clouds is a frequency table showing the occurrences of the key terms.

Figure 37: MSc in Project Management Dissertation Word Cloud: Cohorts five to eight

Word	Frequency	Use per 1,000 words
stakeholder	4574	5.49
client	2941	3.53
team	2936	3.52
time	2723	3.27
process	2530	3.04
risk	2313	2.78
plan	2268	2.72
work	1846	2.22
manager	1797	2.16
strategy	1540	1.85
communication	1512	1.81
information	1257	1.51
change	1150	1.38

Table 9: Word Count Frequency: Cohorts five to eight

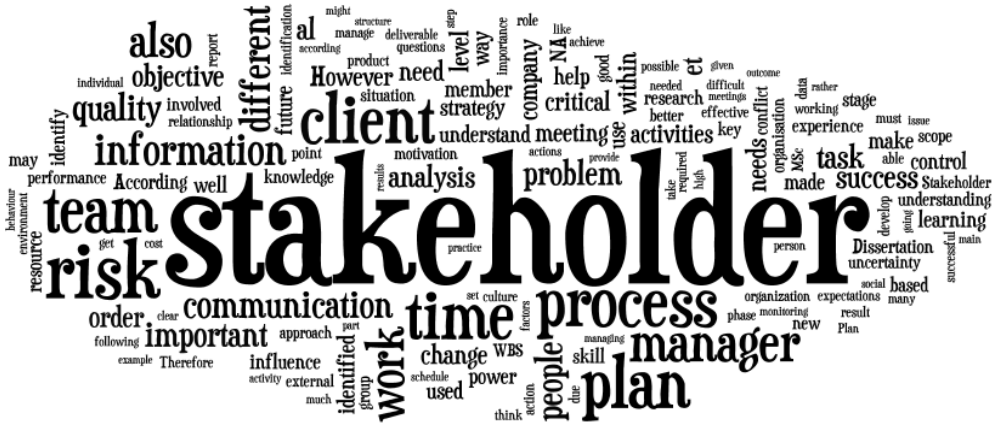


Figure 38: MSc in Project Management Dissertation Word Cloud: Cohort Five

Word	Frequency	Use per 1,000 words
stakeholder	1981	8.41
client	879	3.73
team	588	2.50
time	523	2.22
process	821	3.49
risk	866	3.68
plan	597	2.54
work	487	2.07
manager	488	2.07
strategy	277	1.18
communication	496	2.11
information	382	1.62
change	249	1.06

Table 10: Word Count Frequency: Cohort Five

Figure 39: MSc in Project Management Dissertation Word Cloud: Cohort Six

Word	Frequency	Use per 1,000 words
stakeholder	749	4.26
client	670	3.81
team	520	2.96
time	688	3.92
process	565	3.22
risk	823	4.68
plan	473	2.69
work	379	2.16
manager	369	2.10
strategy	685	3.90
communication	244	1.39
information	228	1.30
change	222	1.26

Table 11: Word Count Frequency: Cohort Six

Figure 40: MSc in Project Management Dissertation Word Cloud: Cohort Seven

Word	Frequency	Use per 1,000 words
stakeholder	895	3.85
client	685	2.95
team	566	2.44
time	921	3.96
process	640	2.75
risk	420	1.81
plan	856	3.68
work	496	2.13
manager	458	1.97
strategy	292	1.26
communication	341	1.47
information	358	1.54
change	401	1.73

Table 12: Word Count Frequency: Cohort Seven

Figure 41: MSc in Project Management Dissertation Word Cloud: Cohort Eight

Word	Frequency	Use per 1,000 words
stakeholder	949	5.00
client	707	3.72
team	1262	6.65
time	591	3.11
process	504	2.65
risk	204	1.07
plan	342	1.80
work	484	2.55
manager	482	2.54
strategy	286	1.51
communication	431	2.27
information	289	1.52
change	278	1.46

Table 13: Word Count Frequency: Cohort Eight

8.3 Key Words: Discussion

The first level of inquiry was stimulated by my curiosity. I was wondering if common themes could be drawn from the diversity of project objectives, the multitude of contexts and the plethora of tasks. I was curious to see if the students' shared experience could help future cohorts engage in an informed 'learning for action' process.

The word clouds provide an accessible overview of the key words the students use to describe their experiences. Looking at the overall word cloud I can see a dominant term ‘stakeholder’ that appears on average 5.49 times per 1,000 words. However, the frequency of use varies considerably (from 8.41 times per 1,000 in Cohort Five to 3.85 times per 1,000 in Cohort Seven). In Cohorts Six, Seven and Eight it was not the most frequently used term, these were ‘risk’, ‘time’ and ‘team’ respectively, but ‘stakeholder’ always appears in the top three terms.

The significance of this pattern is, perhaps, seen more clearly when the word clouds for the dissertations are seen in comparison with those for the PMI Body of Knowledge (2004) and the APM Body of Knowledge (2006) as shown overleaf in Figure 42 & 43 and Table14.

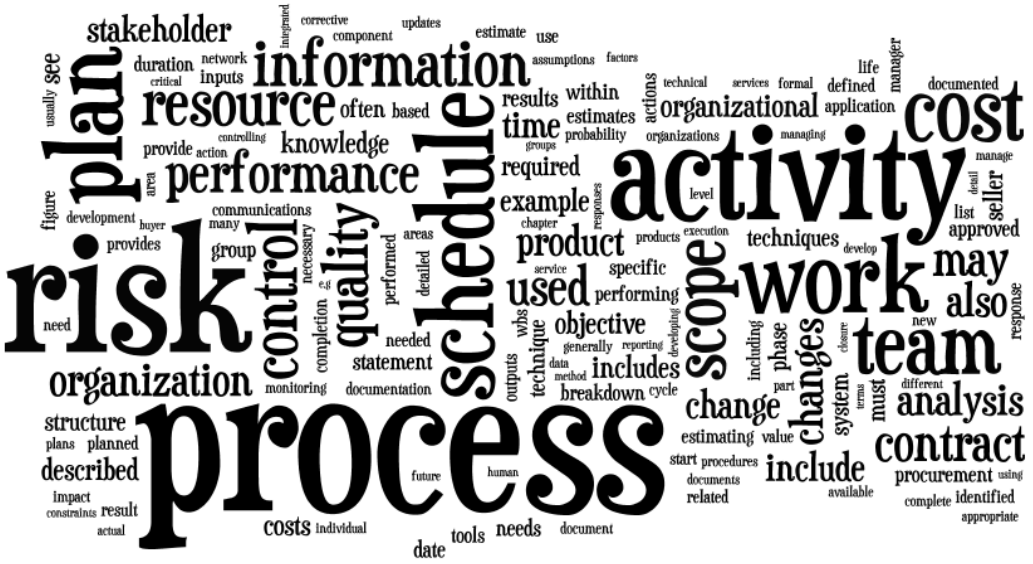


Figure 42: Word Cloud PMI Body of Knowledge (2004)

Figure 43: Word Cloud APM Body of Knowledge (2006)

	Cohort 5		Cohort 6		Cohort 7		Cohort 8		Overall (5-9)		PMI Body of Knowledge		APM Body of Knowledge	
	word count	use per 1,000 words	word count	use per 1,000 words	word count	use per 1,000 words	word count	use per 1,000 words	word count	use per 1,000 words	word count	use per 1,000 words	word count	use per 1,000 words
stakeholder	1981	8.41	749	4.26	895	3.85	949	5.00	4574	5.49	150	1.95	38	0.72
client	879	3.73	670	3.81	685	2.95	707	3.72	2941	3.53	0	0.00	3	0.06
team	588	2.50	520	2.96	566	2.44	1262	6.65	2936	3.52	365	4.75	97	1.85
time	523	2.22	688	3.92	921	3.96	591	3.11	2723	3.27	154	2.00	142	2.71
process	821	3.49	565	3.22	640	2.75	504	2.65	2530	3.04	753	9.79	160	3.05
risk	866	3.68	823	4.68	420	1.81	204	1.07	2313	2.78	780	10.14	102	1.95
plan	597	2.54	473	2.69	856	3.68	342	1.80	2268	2.72	314	4.08	207	3.95
work	487	2.07	379	2.16	496	2.13	484	2.55	1846	2.22	388	5.05	175	3.34
manager	488	2.07	369	2.10	458	1.97	482	2.54	1797	2.16	72	0.94	153	2.92
strategy	277	1.18	685	3.90	292	1.26	286	1.51	1540	1.85	35	0.46	65	1.24
communication	496	2.11	244	1.39	341	1.47	431	2.27	1512	1.81	89	1.16	13	0.25
information	382	1.62	228	1.30	358	1.54	289	1.52	1257	1.51	239	3.11	77	1.47
change	249	1.06	222	1.26	401	1.73	278	1.46	1150	1.38	329	4.28	100	1.91
people	320	1.36	243	1.38	268	1.15	244	1.29	1075	1.29	52	0.68	74	1.41
member	260	1.10	204	1.16	209	0.90	174	0.92	847	1.02	45	0.59	8	0.15
total word count	235430		175671		232356		189850		833307		76907		52416	

Table 14: Comparison of Word Frequency between the Dissertations and the Bodies of Knowledge

In this comparison we can see that whereas ‘stakeholder’ is being used between 3.85 and 8.41 times per 1,000 words in the dissertations, it is only being used

1.95 times per 1,000 in the PMI and 0.72 times per 1,000 in the APM Bodies of Knowledge. This indicates that this topic is much more relevant to the experience of the students and could be more clearly represented within the professional bodies account of their practice. This would also appear to be true of other key words used by the students, for example the term 'client' barely registers within the professional bodies' accounts (see Table 15) overleaf.

Table 15 compares the frequency with which a word is used in the dissertation compared to its usage in the professional Bodies of Knowledge. A figure of 100% indicates they are used at the same frequency whilst figures in excess of 100% show that they are used more frequently in the dissertations than in the professional bodies' account of practice. Likewise, a figure below 100% indicates they are used less frequently in the dissertations than in the professional bodies Bodies of Knowledge.

This analysis shows that the terms 'stakeholder', 'client', 'time', 'manager', 'strategy', 'communication', 'people' and 'member' are all used more significantly[4] more frequently in the students' dissertations than in the PMI Body of Knowledge. A comparison with the APM's Body of Knowledge shows the terms 'stakeholder', 'client', 'team', 'strategy', 'communication' and 'member' are all used more significantly more frequently.

Likewise the terms 'process', 'risk', 'work', 'information' and ''change' are used significantly more frequently in the PMI's Body of Knowledge. In comparison with the APM's there are no terms that are used significantly less frequently.

[4] In this analysis terms that are used have a frequency of 150% are deemed to be used significantly more in the dissertations than the BoK. Likewise, terms with a frequency less than 50% are deemed to be used significantly less in the dissertations than the BoK.

Frequency of the dissertation usage compared to Bodies of Knowledge		
	PMI	APM
stakeholder	281.43%	757.13%
client		6166.41%
team	74.24%	190.39%
time	163.19%	120.62%
process	31.01%	99.46%
risk	27.37%	142.64%
plan	66.66%	68.92%
work	43.91%	66.35%
manager	230.34%	73.88%
strategy	406.08%	149.03%
communication	156.79%	731.59%
information	48.54%	102.68%
change	32.26%	72.34%
people	190.79%	91.38%
member	173.71%	665.97%

Table 15: Frequency Usage in the Dissertations Compared to Bodies of Knowledge

A critique of this analysis is to consider that the dissertations are a reflection of the course rather than the lived experiences of the students. This may be attributed to the desire of the students to comply with an overly rigid marking scheme. That is, to replay the topics that are briefed as being critical by the

dissertation supervisors, to appease the tutors through the exploration of the themes the supervisors direct them to or to recap the perceived discourses of the course itself.

Considering this point I believe that the structure of the dissertations allows for a significant variety in topics and themes. The constraints on the process do not appear to be introduced at the dissertation stage because there is no specified requirement that the dissertation should (or must) focus on areas such as the 'stakeholder' or the 'client'. Likewise it appears unlikely that the dissertation is unduly influenced by the supervisor as they are drawn from a wide variety of academic backgrounds (including non-project management specialists). I believe it is more likely that the course and the tutors influence the students' perception of the world or project management and the key discourses in it. However, even this influence is constrained because the space provided in the class for topics such as 'stakeholders' is limited, comprising of only a couple of lectures out of over one hundred lectures and workshops. Likewise, if the students were deliberately targeting topics that they felt the academic staff expected, then topics such as Earned Value Management or Product Based Planning would have had a more significant presence in the word clouds. These are the 'hot' topics for key members of the teaching staff but are not reflected in the work presented by the students. Therefore I would consider that the accounts of the students are influenced by the course content but not to a level where the dissertations are artificial accounts created primarily for the purpose of appeasing the tutors. Instead they offer a valuable insight into the actuality of students' experiences during their summer dissertations.

8.4 Critical Incident Review: Findings

The analysis of the critical incidents in the dissertation was undertaken using the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan 1954). The dimensions of this analysis are as follows:

- If the learning is drawn from an appreciative (positive) or deficit (negative) moment of practice.
- The arena of reflection as presented by Roffey-Barentsen & Malthouse (2009), plus an additional technique dimension. The six reflective dimensions presented are social, communications, organisational, personal, evaluation and project management technique.
- The topic of reflection as defined within the fifty two areas of the APM's Body of Knowledge (2006).
- The level of reflection as defined by Houtzagers' (1999) framework of specific (single) incidents, repeating cycles or patterns, constraining / governing structures that promote (or inhibit) action, individual and collective mental models.

In this section I will present and illustrate the findings of this analysis through specific examples drawn from the students' dissertations.

8.4.1 The Orientation of Reflection

In analysing the incidents to understand the orientation of the reflection, that is to say whether the learning 'appreciative' or 'deficit' based, the findings were as follows:

- 93 were coded as 'Negative',
- 10 were coded as 'Positive', and
- 7 were not coded due to ambiguity.

This illustrates that the vast majority are drawn from something that has gone awry in the project or in the project manager's perception of their own performance. These incidents cover a broad range of topics and perceptions as illustrated through the later stages of the analysis. In addition, they cover a range of some magnitude as some incidents are seen as near catastrophic whilst others are minor glitches in an otherwise polished performance.

The catastrophic incidents were moments where the student perceived a gross failure of their practice (as measured against their perception or their hope of their professional standards). This type of failure was portrayed by Emma in the summer of 2007:

> When the meeting started all my self-confidence and initiative quickly disappeared and I felt very embarrassed and vulnerable. My two clients seemed to be so confident and prepared about the topic that I realised [myself] to be inferior and simply a student and my questions in my mind were perceived as inadequate and event 'stupid' not providing evidence of the tools and techniques

> acquired during my MSc. I started to lose my linguistic ability and my body language was clear as well.
>
> Emma 2007 p. 10

Leon saw his catastrophic moment arise from the tensions of working with a team member who had a very different working style. Whereas sometimes these tensions arise due to different motivations or perceived abilities of the team members, this was not the case in this project as the two key actors were from the same cultural background and were both exemplar students. Whilst they were very close friends they experienced a destructive tension in their group work. Leon recalls how:

> The WH project was the first time we worked together for a longer period of time and without others in the immediate team. The tension constantly grew over the time of the project as our approach to work seemed to be completely different as well as our way of communication. Towards the end as a risk occurred we had not accounted for, the tension and conflict became so strong that the project was stalled and on the verge of failure due to personal conflicts within the team. I was constantly aware of what was happening, yet felt unable to stop it as the source of conflict was in our approach to work, differing priorities when working with people and differences in leadership styles.
>
> Leon 2007 p. 15

As well as these examples of the near destructive moments experienced in the actuality of the projects, there were also a number of occasions where

the experience was not so dramatic but still of lasting significance to the students.

Sophie recalls how her project was nearly derailed by her lack of engagement with a range of stakeholders, choosing to engage with those who had commissioned the project and who she perceived to be the sole focus of her endeavours:

> At the beginning of the project I did not think about the impact on the stakeholders of implementing the project into the company. I failed to understand the stakeholders' needs and the importance of stakeholder management. I was mainly focussed on delivering the project to the client. Although I had a meeting to discuss the needs and wants of the PM … I did not involve the stakeholders within the project.
>
> Sophie 2005 p.28

Whilst Sophie's significant incident was focussed on the (lack of) external relationships a number of the key moments come from the internal workings of the team. Whilst not as dramatic as Leon's account of the project standing on the edge of failure due to internal conflict, Bao identifies a flare-up in the internal working relationships.

> The revision did not go smoothly as fierce arguments broke out from time to time over the structure, wording and content of the questions. […]we were stuck in the stalemate and the dispute dragged on with each of us defending and adhering to our positions.
>
> Bao 2010 p.17

Bao's experience of conflict arising from a lack of formal structures and authority is far from a unique experience on the course. The nature of most of the students is one in which they aspire to absolute equality in decision making and strive for a consensus. However, once this breaks down there is apparently a reluctance to accept the decision of a self-appointed project manager. Hugo, in 2008, also explores this challenge in their practice:

> One of the aspects [that] I think affected the delays and forced us to re-scope the project was the lack of authority to persuade team members to perform their tasks.
>
> Hugo 2008 p.24

Alongside these incidents that demonstrate the reflective energy of the students and the manner in which the context of the projects can add to the challenges faced, there were a number of significant disruptions to their professional practice. For example, William struggled to control the project due to his perception of shortcomings in his initial work breakdown structure.

> I struggled planning the work breakdown structure which meant that it was difficult to manage the project as I felt that I did not have confidence in how well I was controlling the project.
>
> William 2006 p.47

Another example of this minor disruption is presented by Arnav who recounts how the client had omitted to advise them of a change in a key date. Whilst this schedule slippage had little impact on the client's perception of the project the project team perceived it to be a major incident.

> Two days after submission of the plan we moved into the execution phase of the project. Work started as per plan and was on track for the first two weeks. Until, the middle of the third week when we went to confirm the lease signing date with the client we were informed that the lease would only be signed by the first week of September. This came as a surprise to the project team.
>
> Arnav 2011 p.32

Whilst the deficit based approach seemed to be dominant in the significant learning episodes it is not the exclusive lens applied by the students. There are also moments of insight and learning in the positive experiences of the project.

Examples of this appreciative approach are shown by Ioannis. “It made me realise that questioning a […] client’s request [for a change to the agreed scope] is legitimate if it is stated politely and asks two fundamental things: What exactly is [being] asked [for] and why?” (2006 p.33) and Rosa: “My team member and I seem to have found that right combination of exploiting each other’s assets, for example me being organised and her being creative, which constituted a strong team” (2009 p.41).

8.4.2 Arena of Reflection

In seeking to understand the broad themes of reflective practice, they were analysed against a framework based on Roffey-Barentsen & Malthouse (2009). Their social, communications, organisational and personal categories were used along with an amended category ‘evaluation’ (rather than economic) and an additional category for specific ‘project

management technique(s)'. In considering the significant learning episodes against these categories I identified the following distribution:

- 30 were coded as 'social',
- 24 were coded as 'communications',
- 23 were coded as 'organisational',
- 9 were coded as 'project management technique(s)'
- 8 were coded as 'personal'
- 5 were coded as 'evaluation'
- 11 were not coded due to ambiguity or that the incident was rejected

This demonstrates a broad distribution of learning with the students finding their significant moments in all of the arenas of reflection. However, the balance between the systemic areas of reflection, that is social and communication, is significantly more pronounced than those that focus on the systematic project management techniques, with fifty four systemic incidents as compared to nine systematic.

8.4.2.1 Arena of Reflection: Social

The significant learning moments drawn from the social dimension reflect the challenges that the students had in aligning themselves to the sponsoring organisations. The challenges of fitting into the culture, understanding implicit ways of working, creating / sharing ownership of the project and agreeing social roles, including authority to make decisions, all presented themselves as challenges for the project teams. Illustrating some of these challenges is Dong's almost comic account of how he took the advice that the organisation had an open door policy to heart … only to experience

his line manager's displeasure that he had sought advice from her supervisor. This was magnified by the feedback that the supervisor was also unhappy about being disturbed over what they perceived to be insignificant issues:

> Starting from the first week in [redacted], people around us had been communicating the message that this department is 'an open place'. We were welcomed and encouraged to ask anyone any questions we would like to. As a result, given the fact that we need guidance and confirmation over our project, we started engaging multiple people. The specialists, the project sponsor and [an]other three function leaders were all engaged to help us structure and review our project product. When our temporary supervisor came back [from annual leave], she was unhappy about the fact that we reported to her supervisor Ms. C (Function Leader) without her permission. Also, she informed us that Ms. C was unhappy about the fact that we were engaging her too frequently on small issues.
>
> Dong 2011 p.17

Working in the same organisations (although a couple of years earlier) Zoé had experienced a different challenge. Here Mary, a permanent member of the organisation appeared to have steam-rolled through the design process leaving Zoé to follow in her wake rather than engage in a dialogical process to co-create the project strategy with her co-worker.

> Throughout the project, I faced some challenges. 'Mary' produced some slides, prepared and led the meetings for the project deliverables, developing ideas and concepts before we discussed them.
>
> Zoé 2009 p.19

Contrasting to Zoé's experience of a co-worker who was moving forward on the project without consulting her, Anna found it almost impossible to gain the support and commitment of her co-worker. Anna's account describes the passive resistance that T brings to the project and how, on occasions, this escalates to more active forms of opposition.

> Despite those attempts to involve her, T's commitment to the project could never be fully gained. Throughout the project signs of opposition could be identified.
>
> Anna 2009 p. 34

The frustration of team work that Anna experienced was shared by Hui who recalled the lack of 'sparkle' in her team and a lack of dedication to a collective task (2010, p. 13). Ian also identified how his team were more productive working as individuals rather than as a collaboration group.

> As the project progressed it was becoming more and more apparent that as a team we were not particularly efficient, it was evident that the members of the team had strong opinions which often were not aligned, and so in meetings, it

> seemed to be the case that there was a disproportional amount of time spent discussing a point comparatively speaking in relation to the size of the resultant task. As discussions did not spill over in to negative conflict, this was not apparent at first, and it was in fact a review of progress which revealed it. The review showed that on days we had planned meetings our output was much lower, further to this days where we attempted to work collaboratively had the second lowest output, and the best quantity of work was achieved when we worked as individuals.
>
> Ian 2011 p.24

One of Ian's co-workers also recalled how internal competition within the team threatened to destabilise an otherwise cohesive team.

> Although as friends we were always good to each other but when it came down to working together sometimes the scenario became competitive where one person is trying to outshine the other or present himself better to the client/supervisor.
>
> Arnav 2011 p.11

The students also sought to engage with the social role of project manager. Often their desire to act in this role was inhibited by a client system that did not recognise the formality the students were seeking to instil in the organisation. The organisation was not particularly interested in project management per se but only in the

delivery of a product. Baochai describes how she was diverted from what she believed her core mission to be managing the project, into actually doing the project.

> Instead of managing the project, I felt that I was overwhelmed by actually doing the project and being chased by pouring [sic] expert knowledge of landscaping. The outdoor learning space site seemed to turn into an arena where I, the layman battled against landscaping knowledge without the sword of project management.
>
> Baochai 2011 p.29

The challenge of working in roles, and having a mutual understanding of the responsibilities and affordances of these roles was experienced by Ioannis. Working alongside Lian he recalls how he was reluctant to take the title of leader and how his vision of empowering leadership was at odds to that of Lian who was seeking a more transactional supervisor.

> At the beginning of this project, Lian and I discussed how our team would work. He proposed that I should be 'leader' of the team, a term that I could not accept since the team was too small for a leader. Nevertheless, I did not want to kick off the project with theoretical arguments about leadership and where it is applicable, so I accepted the role interpreting it as being the single communication point between the client and the team, and having the ultimate decision when the team could not

> agree on a mutual acceptable approach. However, this twofold role was not documented in a formal agreement, something that led to a major misunderstanding. Lian walked away from this initial meeting satisfied that he [had] found his leader and I just hoped that leadership would not be an issue in the future. I was wrong. Lian expected to have a leader to guide him every day and tell him what needs to be done in every step. In contrast, I was trying to empower him more and more, to make him feel confident about himself and his skills, to show him that there was no need for a leader because we were in the same level of knowledge and we should be partners rather than leader-follower. Unfortunately, these thoughts were kept secret until July 4th, when instead of our regular work I called a meeting to talk about this issue. After expressing my feelings to Lian, he looked shocked, arguing that we had an 'agreement' that I would be a leader because no team can operate effectively without a leader. I asked for a description of a team leader and the response I got was totally different from my perception of a leader.
>
> Ioannis 2006 p. 12

A final insight on the importance of social roles within the project team was offered to Alexander by his project client. The client was keen to see him balance his technical competency with a more engaging leadership style, urging him to:

> Consider the members of the [redacted] project, they are members of your project too. You are the project manager and it is important to gain commitment among your team members and engage them in the project.
>
> Alexander 2004

8.4.2.2 Arena of Reflection: Communications

Aligned to the challenges that the students faced in the establishment and maintenance of constructive social structures and relationships in their temporary project organisations is the arena of communication. The importance of communication to project success is attested to by Fang who asserts that:

> Communication and stakeholder management was a massive task and something which needed to be continually monitored and managed.
>
> Fang 2011 p.15

The challenges faced by the students in this “massive task” included the ability to identify and access the relevant stakeholders with whom they should have appropriate process of engagement and communication. This was frequently frustrated by cultural and linguistic challenges as well as issues associated with their self-confidence, as seen in Emma’s account of freezing up.

Emma, in 2007, identifies how, whilst she was aware of the importance of communication, she had operated a system where the

communication was at best dormant. Whilst she had created a system and submitted regular reports to the client these did not stimulate a dialogue with the client and were, in her view, ignored, leading Emma to reflect that:

> I did not exchange information in a productive way as the communication channel was surely not 'one-on-one' or 'one-on-two' but 'one-on-nobody'
>
> Emma 2007 p. 26

A similar communication void was experienced by Daiyu who was relying on the project manager not only to approve project progress but also to provide significant a amount of raw data for the project analysis.

> The main issue was that [the] required information was unavailable from [the] project manager while we were depending on that information to plan and execute the project.
>
> Daiyu 2010 p.27

Whilst Emma and Daiyu faced an information void, other students reflected on the effectiveness of ‘working’ communication mechanisms. Halim reflected on the challenges of virtual communication, through emails and voice conferences rather than face to face, whilst Zoé and Hugo found that even having face to face communications was no guarantee that a common understanding would be reached.

> My co-worker and I did not interpret the [workshop] participants' expressed behaviour and feelings in the same way, which created ambiguity in our stakeholder analysis, a key deliverable for the project.
>
> Zoé 2008 p.43

Hugo also found the experience of working with his colleague to be extremely challenging. As the communications between them broke down he found himself “sitting at the same desk but on different worlds" (2008 p. 8).

The challenges of co-creating a productive dialogue may have been increased due to the fact that the communication acts that the students engaged in were often undertaken through the lenses of a second language or significant cultural differences. Lewis describes how these factors created an inefficient communication whirlwind where the cultural differences led him and his team mate to describe the same thing in such different language that they each could not recognise the similarity but believed the other was promoting a very different course of action.

> We then spent an unnecessary twenty minutes discussing each other’s ideas to try and sort out which one would be more useful in the project. The problem came down to the different culture between me and my teammate and as we described this same idea differently we got confused and wasted time.
>
> Lewis 2011 p.23

Olga recalls how her passionate approach to communication had a profoundly negative impact on her co-worker.

> Sometimes during discussions / brainstorming sessions I was coming closer to Amy and increasing voice shouting “Amy, I'm interested, listen, it is [an] important point” whereas Amy’s feelings were as if I'm going to beat her. Such meetings were not productive even though she knew how I am committed to the project.
>
> Olga 2005 p. 45

Whilst these accounts illustrate some of the challenges that the project teams faced there were also stories of effective communication. Javier recalls a significant moment when he intervened in a three ways discussion at the start of the project to explain that:

> […]to my understanding, I think both of you might have different expectations of the project.
>
> Javier 2003 p.18

By identifying that one client was focussing on the prioritisation of a project portfolio whilst the other was focussed on the marketing of projects in the portfolio he was able to pause the discussion and use this insight to develop a cohesive definition of the project objectives.

Elsewhere Fang demonstrated an appreciation of the contribution that establishing a creative dialogue had to their success. In their initial assessment of the project Fang and her colleague focussed on the delivery of a formal written document only to receive guidance from the client that this would not be sufficient as they operated an internal process that valued visual and oral presentations, which were referred to as ”the wall”, to share the findings with as wider audience as possible. Responding to this feedback Fang reflects:

> I think the main reason why the team created such a huge success is that we presented the deliverables in a way that appeals to the stakeholders. Meanwhile, rather than strictly following their method, we improved ‘the wall’ through rational analysis and reflective thinking. Therefore, it is crucial to promote acceptance and gain understanding from the stakeholders.
>
> Fang 2011 p.30

8.4.2.3 Arena of Reflection: Organisational

In considering their work in the summer projects a significant number of students focussed on the relationship between their project and the organisation. This awareness ranged from a desire to appreciate how the project fitted into the ‘big picture’ of the organisation and its strategy through to concerns about the readiness (or capability) of the organisation to accept the outcomes of the project.

These challenges faced the students from day one of their projects. Hui illustrates a dramatic challenge in her project, in that she found it

very difficult to actually identify and engage with the specific person who had commissioned the project in the first place.

> It took me 2 weeks to find out who our sponsor [was] and I have been kept in the dark without fully understanding the client's organisational culture and structure through the whole project.
>
> Hui 2011 p. 35

Naturally, without this introduction and awareness she found the definition of the project to be fraught with difficulties in understanding what was actually required. Similar challenges in connecting the projects' intended output with the organisation's future were felt by a number of the students. Such challenges were often exacerbated by a desire on the part of the clients, as well as the students, to proceed with the 'real work' of the project rather than deliberately developing an appreciation of the project context in conjunction with an understanding of the project output. Jack recollects how his project team did not engage in either a strategic analysis of the organisation nor take any consideration of the project strategy, including how his team would interface with the client's organisation.

> We created our PDP [Project Definition and Plan] with close consultation with our clients and then jumped straight into the Project without first creating a strategy for how we would approach the work that we had to carry out for the client. As well as this we didn't take time to actually identify the strategic direction that [redacted] was heading in

> and as a result it was initially difficult to know if the way we were approaching the work was actually benefitting [redacted] in the long term.
>
> Jack 2011 p.36

A similar, if retrospective, awareness of the benefits of working within the context of the client organisation was presented by Amelia. She recalls how her project could have been more thoroughly grounded in the organisational context by engaging in environmental scanning of the macro-economic issues as well as the internal context of the organisation.

> I realise that undertaking the aforementioned analyses [PESTEL & SWOT] at the outset of the project would likely have helped us as a Project Team to gain a better understanding of 'the bigger picture'. I feel that gaining a wider perspective on the drivers affecting the goals and strategies of the organisation would have greatly aided in informing our development of the project strategy.
>
> Amelia 2011 p.35

Whereas Jack and Amelia perceived the benefits of actively connecting the project and the organisation, after the completion of the project, Maria engaged in this analysis during the initiation of the project. However, what she found caused her great concern because:

> This is when I realised that [redacted] would have to change fundamental practices and major

> aspects of the culture to gain the OHSAS 18001 certificate.
>
> Maria 2006 p. 27

Jack and Amelia assert that a lack of consideration of how the project team and the client organisation connected was a significant issue for their project and one that threatened the long term benefits. The specific consideration of the relationship between the temporary organisation (project team) and the permanent parent organisation can be critical if the right decisions are going to be made in an appropriate manner and time frame. Maya experienced a breakdown of this relationship and saw a near chaotic situation where accountabilities and responsibilities seemed to be ever changing and ambiguous.

> Control and discipline appear to be lacking, perhaps due to the evolving spread of authority, unclear chain of command and multiple vague roles and responsibilities per employee. Roles assigned to individuals are ambiguous with each person being responsible for multiple unrelated functions.
>
> Maya 2011 p.24

Whilst Maya was experiencing a dramatic context Ian experienced a more subtle shift in the organisation's response to the project.

> Despite our best intentions to set the end point in concrete, and to be agreed by both parties, it was becoming evident that some aspects of the project were more often on the agenda in daily

> conversations than others, and that the content of the deliverables was beginning to shift from the agreed. Furthermore our client began to talk of tasks that were in no way related to the project deliverables as writ, and as such we sought to understand the new requirements, and the likely output.
>
> Ian 2011 p.35

Whilst these experiences illustrate the often disjointed and sometimes disconnected relationship between the project and parent organisation there are examples of project teams who have successfully navigated the complexities of organisational life. These are often not spoken about in the dissertations due to the focus on the 'critical incidents' and a leaning towards the 'deficit' based approach but may be seen in the number of the organisations who either recruit students directly from the course or come back to the course year after year for new projects. A closing word on this theme is given by Emma who displayed a contextually aware approach to her project when she recognised the need for flexibility in her approach, asserting that "processes are … invented and need to be modified in light of the environment" (2007 p.19). This level of insight into the contextual and socially constructed nature of project management practice is a clear illustration of the ability of some students to move through the positivistic ontology of the Bodies of Knowledge and into contested world of project management practice. This theme is covered more fully in the stories from the field (see Section 8.6).

8.4.2.4 Arena of Reflection: Project Management Technique

The dissertation provides a space for the students to engage in public reflection and to consider the development of their practice from a number of different perspectives. Whilst the dominant theme in the dissertations is the development of professional relationships there is still an opportunity to consider their deployment of the systematic techniques of project management.

Anna recalls a common problem in project management practice when she reflects that her project plan was “precise rather than accurate” (2009 p.17). By this she means that she had undertaken a significant level of work to break down the project into what she saw where the constituent parts but that once the project had gone live the real world activities did not fall neatly into these boxes. New activities would emerge and sometimes the work she had planned to do was no longer required. For students, this experience can lead to significant frustration, doubt about the relevance of project management and a self-examination as to their professional competence.

In her work Ai experienced a sense of confusion drawn from the alignment between the systematic toolkit and the problematic real world. In short she found it difficult to structure an evolving situation through the rigid regimes of the work breakdown structure.

> I was confused every time when I was producing the WBS for a project. How detailed should it be? In my opinion, I thought we should make the WBS as detailed as we could since the project we worked

> on was not a very big or complex one. When I looked at the WBS we produced, I always thought it should be more detailed and the way we separated the project was not appropriate. I was worrying about some of the activities we put into WBS were not the activities or tasks in the lowest level but some elements in a higher level. Some of the activities seemed to be very 'big' which needed to be supported by some other activities. Was our WBS detailed enough in this stage for the project planning?
>
> Ai 2011 p.10

William had a similar experience to Ai which impacted on his self-confidence to act as he believed a professional project manager would.

> I struggled planning the work breakdown structure which meant that it was difficult to manage the project as I felt that I did not have confidence in how well I was controlling the project.
>
> William 2006 p.47

Whilst Ai and William were struggling to map the real world onto their framework for planning future action other students found the tools to be of considerable benefit to their practice. Ioannis recalls how deployment of a sophisticated project management control system (Earned Value) provided the project team with a clear view of project progress.

> As we spent much time on these important, but out of scope, activities, the EVS [Earned Value System] immediately showed that our project was running late.
>
> Ioannis 2006 p.23

The impact that their practice had on the students' perception of their self-efficacy is considered further in the following section.

8.4.2.5 Arena of Reflection: Personal

The engagement in the summer projects was frequently the first time that the students had experienced the realities of organisational contexts and project management practices at first hand. This experience was one that the students had been looking forward to for most of the course and is a key factor that influences their choice of Lancaster's course above those of similar universities. However, the actuality of the experience was frequently different to their preconceptions and occasionally focussed their attention on their own preferred working styles.

Mark experienced the actuality of his project as one that was professionally and personally debilitating. During a project review meeting he was given a stark message by a senior stakeholder namely that the "problem with the [redacted] project is it adds no value to the business" (2009 p. 16). This perception had seen the project put on the back burner for a number of years but as the date for compliance with a legal requirement drew near the project was resurrected. Despite the pressing demand for completion Mark saw

the project as being contested at various levels of the organisation and this had an impact on him.

> My attitude to the summer project at this point was undoubtedly very negative. In regards to the project itself I was tired of the organisational politics surrounding my project and as a result had come to the conclusion on the 24th July [2 weeks before the scheduled end] that I would not achieve any further successful progression in my project deliverables.
>
> Mark 2009 p. 36

Mark goes on to recognise that this demotivation was not just because of the political nature of the project but mainly due to the social environment he found himself in.

> But through reflection the major cause of de-motivation was the external environment I had to surround myself in to work at the [redacted]. I was tired of travelling to Manchester every week, living in sparse university accommodation and eating ready meals. I was tired of sitting in an office in front of a computer all day long. I was tired of feeling unfit and lethargic. Put simply I was tired of the environment I was finding myself in and it was demotivating me.
>
> Mark 2009 p. 36

Javier found that the context of his project brought out a dual desire for perfectionism achieved through excessive control.

> During the project I sometimes failed to remember our scope and also, under the guise of a desire to achieve the best possible quality, I tried to learn and define every single minute detail of the project. This behaviour, very common in me when working on projects, not only makes me feel more anxious and apprehensive but also makes me allocate more time and effort to projects than is essential
>
> Javier 2004 p. 27

This desire to focus on details and to create a rigorous plan was also identified by Anna, Mark and Alexander. Anna identified this as a personal trait and one which she uses to avoid risks in her professional life.

> Conspicuous was high risk avoidance during the planning phase which [was] exposed in very detailed planning and continuous control points over the project duration.
>
> Anna 2009 p. 56

Whilst Mark also expresses a preference for having “a very clear boundary as to what is 'in' and what is 'out' [of the project]” (2009 p.28). Alexander reflects on the personal consequences of the fluid nature of projects. He describes how the initial period during which the scope of the work was negotiated between various stakeholders created a mental barrier which constrained his work.

> For a considerable period of time, almost three weeks, a sense of ambiguity in regard to the project definition was looming large in my mind obstructing me from proceeding with confidence and full concentration to the ensuing phases of execution.
>
> Alexander 2005 p. 36

From these accounts I can appreciate more fully the emotional energy that is invested by the students in the projects and how the ambiguous nature of the project may act as a strong motivator but may also create a climate for anxiety, self-sacrifice and doubt about the project manager's efficacy as well as the ability of the project management toolkit to define and constrain a vibrant project environment. In this world, project management moves beyond a rationalistic deployment of defined tools into one where the emotional labour of the project team comes to the fore.

8.4.2.6 Arena of Reflection: Evaluation

Adapting Roffrey-Barentsen & Malthouse's (2009) arenas of reflection to align to the world of project management I changed the heading of 'economic' into 'evaluation'. In this arena I was interested to see how the students reflected on the efficacy of their project, that is, did it deliver what it was intended to as well as the dimensions of project management and efficiency. Was the project on time and using the planned amount of resources?

A third perspective of evaluation is effectiveness, does the project deliver the expected benefits to the organisation? Due to the requirement for students to leave the organisation at the end of the

project in order to focus on the dissertation the effectiveness of the intervention is often overlooked in the accounts of practice. However, Ian articulates a need for the project team to have a clear remit that this is aligned to the organisation's imperatives.

> It is important to fully understand the remit of a project before any work is commenced [….in] order then to set the remit of the project we must understand the reasoning behind the project and what therefore it hopes to achieve.
>
> Ian 2011 p.11

A further consideration of the effectiveness of the project is provided by Fang. She brings to the fore the need for the deliverables of the project to fit into the culture of the organisation.

> When I was commissioned with this project of designing the operational process, the main concern for the [redacted] was "Will the process suit the department?"
>
> Fang 2011 p.38

This ability to consider organisational alignment and cultural fit of the project is commendable and illustrates a maturity of practice demonstrated by the students.

Bao reflects on how the quality of the project was compromised in the closing stages. This was in part due to the looming deadline but also due to the need to engage with the client at a different level to assist them to translate their findings into practical ways forward.

> When we started to draft recommendations and action plans on July 28th, we experienced a discouraging sense of powerlessness to transform the findings into practical proposals. Due to the time constraint, a compromise was quickly reached between the team mates to sacrifice quality and narrow down the project scope. While recommendations were worded in a more general manner, action plans were dropped because of poor understanding of the client. Although the compromise made possible the timely submission, the project did not fully complete its objectives.
>
> Bao 2010 p. 42

The key mechanisms for asserting efficiency control over the project is through the use of strategic milestones as well a more sophisticated cost schedule control systems such as Earned Value. Whilst a number of students found the Earned Value system with its dual focus on schedule and resource efficiency to be beneficial to project control, some struggled with its application or found it to be counterproductive. Emile reflects how he:

> […] used EV for the first two weeks of execution but felt that it was not accurately reflecting the amount of work that we had done. Also it did not allow the sponsors to see how much work was completed on the project.
>
> Emile 2011 p. 21

Lian also found that the planning estimates behind their initial milestones created a situation where they did not drive the project on as anticipated. Instead of being a productive artefact that promoted a culture of control the milestone plan became something that they avoided:

> Milestones were selected and deadlines set. But in practice these milestones did not work. Every time when I was producing the weekly RAG report, to check the progress of the project, I felt reluctant to compare the actual progress to the planned milestones.
>
> Lian 2009 p.20

These accounts of project control illustrate the significant learning that the students have attained through a desire to exert proactive control over their projects. However, they also reflect the tension between knowing what to do with the mechanics of Earned Value and understanding how to do it with wisdom in the moment.

In this analysis a picture emerged of the challenges (and learning) that arose through the social dimensions of the project rather than the 'know what' dimension associated with a capable deployment of a specific project management tool. In looking at the significant moments associated with the social and communication dimensions of the analysis, a picture emerges. The ability to deploy the systematic tools of project management practice is not enough. In addition to these foundations the skilled practitioner looks to the practice of 'know how' as well 'know what'.

8.4.3 Topics of Reflection

Section 8.4.2 demonstrates the significant learning moments were predominantly associated with the systemic aspects of project management practice, namely social relationships and communication. Whilst this is undoubtedly a significant insight as to the emergence of their professional capabilities it is also pertinent to examine their learning through an analysis of the domain knowledge. To investigate this further the topics of reflection were analysed against the fifty two areas of the APM's Body of Knowledge. These topics are grouped into seven themes and provide an insight into the areas that the UK's professional body for project management see as being crucial to practitioner accreditation and development. Figure 44 below shows the seven themes and the subunits of each theme.

Figure 44: Subject Themes in the Association of Project Management Body of Knowledge
Source: APM (2006 p.5)

In analysing the incidents to understand the professional topic of the significant learning episode the findings were as follows:

- 6 were coded as ‘project management in context’,
- 19 were coded as ‘planning the strategy’,
- 15 were coded as ‘executing the strategy’,
- 10 were coded as ‘techniques’,
- 1 were coded as ‘business and commerce’,
- 19 were coded as ‘organisation and governance’,
- 35 were coded as ‘people and the profession’, and
- 5 were not coded as they fell outside the categories

Of the fifty-two sub-categories twenty six were identified in the analysis. The areas where there was a lack of coverage included a number of techniques that are not an explicit part of the course, which include value engineering, technology management or health, safety and environmental management, as well as the broad area of ‘business and commerce’.

8.4.3.1 Topics of Reflection: People and the Profession

The broad theme of ‘people and the profession’ received a significant proportion of the hits in this analysis. The close alignment of this theme with the dissertation chapter ‘working effectively with people’ provides some insight into its predominance, although an enquiry into the sub-themes brings to the fore the nature and their perceived impact on the professional lives of the students.

The sub-theme communications received ten hits. In this section we can see a range of challenges that the students faced in their projects.

These range from Emma's account of her "one to nobody system" (see section 8.4.2.2), Lewis's account of the inefficiency of their communication due to cultural barriers (see section 8.4.2.2) and Dong's misunderstanding about the 'open door' policy in his organisation (see section 8.4.2.1).

In addition to these dramatic moments there were also a number of occasions where the students were speaking a technical (project management) language that they expected the client to understand but received very clear signals from them that this was not being understood. Olga recalls how:

> When our stakeholder [redacted] heard the word like 'WBS' he became silent, and was keen to leave the meeting, his body language expressed that he was not interested in the discussion. Only when I and Amy started talking about environmental improvements, he showed genuine interest.
>
> Olga 2005 p. 35

Six years later in a different project Dong had a similar experience. He recounts that:

> […] while communicating with the stakeholders using the booklet, the stakeholders seemed to be impatient and confused about what we were talking about.
>
> Dong 2011 p.38

In these episodes we can see that perhaps the students were seeking to act into their profession by using the formal language of project management rather than seeking to act into the context of the project and to communicate to the stakeholders in words and actions that they understood.

Another significant theme is the nature of conflicts and conflict management in projects. Leon reflects on the growing tension in his project team (see Section 8.4.1) whilst his co-worker Anna noticed signs of opposition from T. throughout the project (see Section 8.4.2.1). However their project was not the only one to feel this tension. Bao recalls how the project team were stuck in the conflict situation in the development phase of the project. Each team member became more entrenched in their original position as the conflict developed.

> The revision did not go smoothly as fierce arguments broke out from time to time over the structure, wording and content of the questions. […] we were stuck in the stalemate and the dispute dragged on with each of us defending and adhering to our positions.
>
> Bao 2010 p.17

Zhu recalls how her project team responded to a similar conflict situation by seeking the arbitration of the supervisor. In this incident it is interesting to observe, both how she regards the conflict as natural and the team's desire to respond to this by drawing in a legitimate and formal source of power (the supervisor) rather than resolving it internally.

> It is group nature to have conflicts during the group work. There was no exception in my project team. In the project initialization phase, we had strong opinion diversified between a member and the rest of team. Even [when] we tried to vote out the decision, the member still insisted on his own opinion until being arbitrated by our supervisor.
>
> Zhu 2011 p.39

Within the dissertations a number of students focus on the behavioural characteristics that they saw either in themselves or others during the execution of the project. In the sections above we can see Javier's drive for perfectionism (see Section 8.4.2.5), Anna's desire to mitigate against risks through detailed planning (see Section 8.4.2.5) and Emma's self-doubt as she sat in the first meeting with the project clients (see Section 8.4.1).

As well as these dramatic accounts a number of other students reflected on their response to project situations. Mark recalls how his living out of a suitcase lifestyle during his project made him more lethargic (see Section 8.4.2.5) whilst Rosa recalls her emotional response to the feedback she received from the project client.

> This incident made me upset and caused frustration, since I thought he should not focus mainly in one thing that was left out of scope while we had ten points in it …. Different feelings arose about the project and my negotiation skills, which were all

mostly negative; disappointment, anger and depression

Rosa 2008 p.30

These reflections on a range of behavioural characteristics illustrate the energy that the students are putting into the novel situation of working within a project context and within a new organisation. They also show how the actuality of a project manager's role goes far beyond the rational world of the tools and techniques to become *emotional labour*. In Section 8.6 this theme of the project manager as an ambassador and champion of the project is returned to as it is a key theme that emerges in the interviews.

8.4.3.2 Topics of Reflection: Organisation and Governance

The projects that formed the basis for the summer projects were located within external organisations. This presented a number of novel dimensions to the students' experience including pacing of the work to the tempo of the organisation, alignment of their practices to the 'parent' organisation and the extent to which the organisation wanted to flex its power in the project environment.

In considering the students' learning about their ability to align themselves to the modus operandi of their parent organisation we see Hui's sense of loss at not being able to identify the project sponsor in the parent organisation (see Section 8.4.2.3), Maya's struggle with the lack of organisational accountability (see Section 8.4.2.3) and Alexander's hesitancy to proceed with the project work during the initial project definition (see section 8.4.2.4).

These findings are complemented by the insights into the nature of the (student) project managers' authority. We can see above, Baochai's frustration at being drawn into the task rather than acting as a 'manager' (see Section 8.4.2.1) and Hugo's frustrations that he was not able to persuade the team members to perform their tasks (see Section 8.4.1). Elsewhere Mark recalls how his project team was affected by the political manoeuvring as one member sought to be recognised as the project leader.

> As project team member [redacted] began to try to push for the 'leadership' role within the project, particular aspects of his work changed. For example, he no longer was producing work towards the project deliverables, and decided his priority task was to manage the project team and stakeholders through giving orders as to work needing to be completed etc. Secondly, and possibly the most affecting aspect to this change, was the fact that team member [redacted] no longer carried out his delegated role within the project team which meant that there was now a gap, and therefore work was no longer being communicated correctly.
>
> Mark 2012 p.26

These reflections illustrate the challenges that project managers face when working within a temporary organisation structure. The struggle for authority experienced by Javier, Maya or Mark is all too familiar for experienced project practitioners.

8.4.3.3 Topics of Reflection: Planning the Strategy

The theme of planning the strategy attracted nineteen 'hits' in the analysis of the critical incidents. The criticality of this stage of the project management lifecycle was identified by Jack. Whilst he identified a positive first stage of the project, he then goes on to recall how the strategy was overlooked.

> We created our PDP with close consultation with our clients and then jumped straight into the Project without first creating a strategy for how we would approach the work that we had to carry out for the client.
>
> Jack 2010 p.36

Key to the students' experience was the topic of stakeholder management. In their accounts I can learn about the intricacies of the students' practice and some of the tribulations they had to face in engaging and working with a diverse population.

The amount of attention that stakeholder management demanded startled Hui who commented that:

> It was out of my expectation that stakeholder management in this project would become my biggest concern.
>
> Hui 2011 p.24

Hui's experience was not unique. Above we have read about Dan's experience of being told that he was working on a project that no

one wanted (see Section 8.4.4) and can also appreciate Sophie's reflection of the importance of the wider stakeholder community, as well as her project client.

> At the beginning of the project I did not think about the impact on the stakeholders of implementing the project into the company. I failed to understand the stakeholders' needs and the importance of stakeholder management. I was mainly focussed on delivering the project to the client. Although I had a meeting to discuss the needs and wants of the PM for [redacted] and discussing the benefits of the system, I did not involve the stakeholders within the project
>
> Sophie 2005 . p.28

However, as well as these reflections on developing practice there are also accounts of the robust practice exhibited by the students. We read about Javier's intervention when his two principal stakeholders were viewing the project through very different lenses (see Section 8.4.2.2) and also hear Ioannis' reflection on the legitimacy of challenging project requirements:

> [I]t made me realise that questioning an unreasonable client's request is legitimate if it is stated politely and asks for two fundamental things: what exactly is asked and why.
>
> Ioannis 2006 p.33

Other reflections within the theme of planning the project strategy include Fang's focus on the cultural fit of her solution (see Section

8.4.2.5), Maria's appreciation "that it would be wiser to conduct the meetings in the way that the client was more comfortable with" (2006 p. 19) and Baochi's unease that her "sub-team have little control over the product quality" (2011 p.13).

8.4.3.4 Topics of Reflection: Executing the Strategy

The APM Body of Knowledge defines the theme of executing the strategy as including processes associated with the definition and management of project scope as well as the key elements of project planning, for example scheduling, resource management and change control. In the analysis of the critical incidents this theme attracted fifteen 'hits', with all of these aspects appearing in the students' accounts.

In considering the topic of scope definition and management, Lewis identified how the "failure" to meet with two key stakeholders to define the scope resulted in an ill-defined scope:

> These two stakeholders have a major say in the project requirement and due to a lack of communication the project has no clarity in its purpose at the moment.
>
> Lewis 2011 p.16

This failure to define the scope with the client created a void. This void may be created by the clients having a desire for a 'black box' solution where they do not need to get personally involved. However, this type of void can also be co-created by the students assuming too much responsibility for the success of the project.

An example of this is provided by Mark who reflects back on how his teams' eagerness to fill this void laid the foundations for future problems:

> We looked to create the basic components of the statement of requirements, scope, deliverables etc. However, this was written by the project team without any input from the client themselves. It was this that led to many issues within the project.
>
> Mark 2011 p.35

Challenges with scope definition of the project may be seen as being avoidable with a more systemic approach to the management of the project. The ability to co-construct a project definition with the client and key stakeholders would have enabled the students to build their work on a solid foundation.

This systemic perspective can also be seen in the manner in which the project planning was undertaken by a number of the project teams. Bao describes a lack of joined up thinking in the way his team created the overall project plan. He recalls that whilst:

> we were familiar with the elements that should be included, we failed to consider interdependency and struggled with the sequence to piece them together. For example, one teammate was in charge of the PBS and WBS and spent nearly the whole planning period on them, while the rest two worked on the [other] parts.
>
> Bao 2010 p. 31

A crucial element of the project strategy is the ability to keep the process of planning alive throughout the project rather than think of it as a one off process that creates *the* plan. Consequently the APM positions the change management process as part of the executing the strategy. The importance of this process was identified by Lan. However, despite the client's engagement with this system she found that the actual impact on the project was negligible, with the client continuing to introduce ad-hoc changes throughout the duration of the project:

> Inevitably, the scope was too large that it was unrealistic to accomplish in the timeframe. Then we re-scoped the project. The scope was reduced and signed off without difficulty. … However, I noticed that the decided scope was not taken as standard. In another words, they did not care much about the scope. They kept changing, and the project management team was assigned many new tasks to do, no matter in or out of scope.
>
> Lan 2008 p. 29

Lan's experience was similar to that of Ian three years later where the desire to fix the end point of the project in stone did not prevent the client from trying to get the project team to go the extra mile:

> Despite our best intentions to set the end point in concrete, and to be agreed by both parties, it was becoming evident that some aspects of the project were more often on the agenda in daily

> conversations than others, and that the content of the deliverables was beginning to shift from the agreed. Furthermore our client began to talk of tasks that were in no way related to the project deliverables as writ, and as such we sought to understand the new requirements, and the likely output.
>
> Ian 2011 p.35

These insights into the execution of the project strategy illustrate the manner in which the artefacts of project management (e.g. the plan) come to life through a systemic engagement with the client and stakeholders. However, crucial to this systemic practice is the need to keep the process alive, to continually co-create the plan in a language that the client and stakeholders can appreciate.

8.4.3.5 Topics of Reflection: Techniques

In the critical incident analysis relatively few were focussed on the development of knowledge of a technique from either a conceptual or practical basis. William expressed his concern about estimating as a deliberate process but also situated this within the context of his "lack of experience":

> I did not have faith in my application of estimates [techniques], this was due to the uncertainty within the project but was predominately due to a lack of experience when estimating the duration of tasks necessary to schedule a project.
>
> William 2006 p.34

Elsewhere the contextual factors behind the application of the project management techniques were the focus of the learning. In the sections above we have seen Javier and Anna recognise their forensic approach to planning (see Section 8.4.2.5 above), Ai's confusion about how detailed her work breakdown structure should be (see Section 8.4.2.4) and Lan's struggle to identify performance milestones that would exert control over the project (see Section 8.4.2.5).

Another contextual factor relating to the techniques of project management covers the knowledge and experience clients had of formalised project management. Far's observation that:

> From the very beginning of this project, the team shares a common feeling that our client is not as "professional" as we expected. When I say "professional" here, it means the client had very little experience and knowledge about project management
>
> Far 2011 p.16

The lack of a common background or a shared language was identified by Olga as a significant incident. Olga identified how the overzealous use of the 'professional' language could distract or alienate the stakeholders (see Section 8.4.3.1 above). Olga's experience was similar to Halim's:

> During the fifth week of the project I had [a] project progress meeting with the project manager at which meeting I discussed the project progress and

> mentioned that the project is behind the schedule but on budget. The project manager asked me how I knew that the project was on budget but behind schedule. I showed him the Earned Value graph which presented the work done, budget spent and time elapsed. The project manager responded by saying "I am not good in Excel, I do not understand the complicated approaches and this concept of Earned Value is new to me. Therefore, there is no need to use this new concept to measure the project progress."
>
> Halim 2011 p.9

This focus on the context rather than the technique echoes the reflective nature of the dissertations where the emphasis is on developing personal practice. However it also illustrates the conundrums that practitioners face with the emphasis on the "swampy lowlands" (Schön, 1987) where the messy, confusing problems take precedence over the "technical solution" (ibid).

8.4.3.6 Topics of Reflection: Project Management in Context

The final theme of the APM Body of Knowledge 'project management in context', considers some of the fundamental concepts and definitions of the practice of project management. It also draws attention to the way that projects are created in a specific context and that the practice of project management needs to be cognisant of this context rather than assuming that projects take place within a vacuum.

The benefit that contextual awareness could have offered to the project is demonstrated by a number of the students. For example Jack considers how their practice was impulsive, with the team "jumping straight into [the task]" and goes onto appreciate that:

> As well as this we didn't take time to actually identify the strategic direction that [redacted] was heading in and as a result it was initially difficult to know if the way we were approaching the work was actually benefitting [redacted] in the long term.
>
> Jack 2011 p.36

Amelia was working with Jack on this project. She also reflects that a more thorough contextual analysis could have offered "a better understanding of the bigger picture" (2011 p. 35).

8.4.3.7 Topics of Reflection: Conclusion

Across the APM themes we can see evidence of the students getting to grips with the actuality of project management practice. They are deploying the tools in an endeavour to understand, plan, execute and control the project. However, these mechanisms are seen as being necessary but not sufficient for the practice of project management.

Often they are faced with problem situations that do not neatly align to the predefined frameworks or prescribed tools. Instead their practice develops in an emergent environment. The project requirements, constraints and resources develop over time. Likewise, the actors are often unclear about their responsibilities or may see the project as a stage for their own 'political' aims as they compete

for an enhanced role in the unfolding drama. These dimensions of complexity can be magnified by an organisation that is not necessarily sophisticated in its deployment of project management practices or (on occasion) rejects the structures that the students seek to apply.

These challenges create an environment where the students may feel they are on shifting sands. Occasionally the experience that they have looked forward to as the launch of their career may be experienced as one that challenges their self-schema through ambivalent or negative clients, conflict ridden teams and challenging personal situations. In the next section the analysis moves from a consideration of the technical aspects into a consideration of the levels of learning that the students engage in.

8.4.4 Levels of Reflection

Houtzagers (1999) identifies a typology of reflective practice that moves through an inquiry into specific (single) incidents, through to repeating cycles or patterns, exploring constraining / governing structures that promote (or inhibit) action and into the domains of individual and collective mental models. In mapping the significant learning episodes against this framework I was able to identify whether or not the students' inquiry was focussed on understanding, reframing or changing paradigms or efficaciously resolving specific problems.

In analysing the incidents to understand the level of reflection, the findings were as follows:

- 87 were coded as 'specific (single) incidents',
- 6 were coded as 'repeating cycles or patterns',
- 2 were coded as 'constraining / governing structures',
- 3 were coded as 'Individual mental models',
- 1 was coded as 'collective mental models',
- 11 were not coded as they fell outside the categories

The initial analysis shows a significant focus on the efficacious resolution of specific episodes. These incidents are presented as bright sparks of reflection, a single point of light that is not placed within a personal context that links them to previous episodes of practice. For example, above we heard how Hui's experience was of stakeholder management was "out of my expectation" (see Section 8.4.3.3) or we can hear how Abena was "distraught that the risk plan had failed to prioritise risks effectively" (2011 p.12) but we do not see how these incidents are similar to previous experiences or if they are unique moments of practice.

Likewise the focus on exploring these significant moments is about resolving the issue at hand rather than stepping back to understand at a more critically reflective level, the elements that lie below the surface. For example, when Leon reflects on this:

> The situation arose where I had to ask myself whether I should deliver what the client seemed to want which moved away from the strategic focus or manage the client towards the original plan.
>
> Leon 2009 p. 56

He is doing so in isolation of other events in his career where the project started to shift as it emerged from the planned representation to a living entity.

This focus on the specific without apparently considering the project as a part of a system, or a number of systems is also seen in Mark's work. He experienced considerable frustration at the apparent lack of meaning of his project to the organisation as a whole:

> I attended a project prioritisation meeting with [redacted]. During this meeting he stated 'the problem with the [redacted] project is it adds no value to the business.
>
> Mark 2009 p.38

Perhaps a more holistic view of the organisation and the way that the project connected to other projects or operations could have provided Mark with the insights required to promote the urgency of the project and the relevance of it to other business operations.

However, the ability to see issues as systemic was demonstrated by a number of the students who saw the challenges as arising out of a pattern of behaviours or the way in which their individual mental models had constructed the situation. For example, we hear about Zoé's being caught in a cycle of uncooperative behaviour from one of her stakeholders (see Section 8.4.2.1) and Arnav's account of his project team's uncooperative behaviour as they tried to 'outshine' each other (see Section 8.4.2.1).

These insights into recurring patterns were further developed by a number of the students who looked into their own personality to understand more

fully some of the keys to more efficacious project management. This desire to understand their own drivers is seen in Anna's consideration of how her values and patterns of behaviour created a challenging situation for her project team:

> Certain values, behavioural patterns and therefore a certain approach to projects of myself exposed during the planning and execution of the [redacted] project. Conspicuous was high risk avoidance during the planning phase which exposed in very detailed planning and continuous control points over the project duration. Another crucial point can be named in form of my values concerning work ethics such as that I did not see the need to motivate T.
>
> Anna 2009 p. 56

Other examples of the way that individuals' mental models are seen to contribute towards the learning include Ioannis's account of the different perceptions of leadership between himself and Lian (see 8.4.2.1 above) and Alexander's anxiety as the project became ambiguous due to competing requirements from various stakeholder groups (see Section 8.4.2.5).

Whilst there are some insights into the way that an individual's preferences and values are creating opportunities for project success or constraining professional practice, the same was not witnessed for the collective mental models. Sophia makes reference to the way in which the organisational culture of her client's organisation would have to change if the project was to achieve its long range objectives. Perhaps this insight was drawn from the fact that she knew this culture well (as the organisation was her

family's business) whereas the majority of the students were stepping into a new context. An additional feature that may give rise to this is the predominance of projects that take place outside of the organisation, rather than having the project team embedded in the organisation for a period of time. In such an 'outsiders' position it is, perhaps, hardly surprising that the students are not seeing the cultural influences or collective mindset of the organisation as a key influence on their professional practice.

In this analysis of the levels of reflection it is apparent that the students are drawing significant moments from their practice as a basis of their learning about the actuality of project management practice. However, this basis is in the form of a single burst of light rather than a woven tapestry of practice that links events across time or dimensions of learning. Perhaps this focus is influenced by the relatively few cycles of practice the students perceive they have been through (i.e. their reluctance to link episode x with previous projects if they do not feel they have really done any previous projects). In addition the language used to introduce and describe 'critical incidents' may encourage students to focus in on a single episode rather than a thematic challenge.

8.5 Critical Incidents: Discussion

The analysis of the critical incidents through the lenses of areas of learning, themes of professional practice and layers of learning has provided insight into the emerging practice of the students. It has identified how there is a strong emphasis on the specific, individual incident.

This 'critical incident' approach which dominates the dissertations appears to have two significant consequences. Firstly, the focus on the dramatic and

secondly the focus on the specific moment. The privilege given to the fire-fly or 'ah ha' moment, when the high drama of the zenith or nadir of practice reveals an inner truth to the practitioner pushes these more subtle moments of learning into the shadows. In addition, the focus on the revealing moment often pushes into the background a consideration of systemic influences on practice, for example the connections to other practice, or similarities / differences between episodes of practice.

This focus on the radiance of a specific moment may be encouraged by the linguistic nuances of the critical incident (as a singular term), rather than by a more embracing terminology relating to being able to see 'patterns of practice' or 'journeys of discovery' and 'learning themes'). In addition, the course handbook and the direction of tutors, including myself, have placed undue emphasis on the individual critical incident rather than seeking to present the learning as an inquiry into the similarity or difference between current practice and previous, or desired future, practice.

The emphasis on the specific critical incident without looking at its place within the wider context of the project or a broader pattern of events appears to constrain the students within a 'single loop' paradigm (Argyris & Schön 1974). By this I mean the desire to engage in more efficacious action or to be more efficient, rather than drawing from these moments a deeper insight into the schemas, values and visions that may drive iterations of practice development. This focus on the efficacious treatment of the single critical incident may be linked to the contextual factors associated with the action dissertations. The length of the action learning experience, the limited contact the majority of students have with the client organisation and system, and the independent nature of the project may encourage the students to focus on what they see as the immediate challenges rather than the medium to long term opportunities for

development. In addition the age and the cultural backgrounds of the students may influence their choice of topics.

Whilst this analysis has identified the development of a more systemic consciousness as an opportunity for the growth of the course there are also a number of compelling strengths that emerge from it. It is apparent that the students display a compelling level of honesty and courage in the critique of their personal practice. There is no sense that they are manufacturing 'critical incidents' to fit the dissertation requirements, rather they are considering areas where they can see the benefit of enhanced professional practice.

The richness of this learning for future cohorts of students is compelling. Within these accounts lie the nuances of professional practice and so rather than thinking of them as an end point for a particular cohort of students they could provide a rich and fitting starting point for future cohorts. Developing the dissertations into a narrative account to articulate and communicate practice to future cohorts would offer opportunities for 'preparing for action' that is, using key scenarios from the previous cohort to consider how they would approach their client engagement. This would enable students to begin connecting experiences and sharing stories with students from previous cohorts acting as mentors by describing how they worked through the issue, and developing a richer picture of the knowledge that is beneficial to apprentice practitioners.

A further consideration to be made is the benefit of providing a broad map of the territory covered by this analysis to show the dimensions of Roffey-Barentsen & Malthouse's (2009) arenas for reflective practice, APM themes and Houtzagers' (1999) classification matrix which could be used to develop further reflection. These elements are supplemented by encouragements to consider systemic as well as systematic perspectives in order to balance the awareness of the task and process. The final dimension is titled "(Future) Histories" to draw attention to the

journey of discovery through a focus on the patterns of practice and the attention paid to future practice (see Figure 45, below).

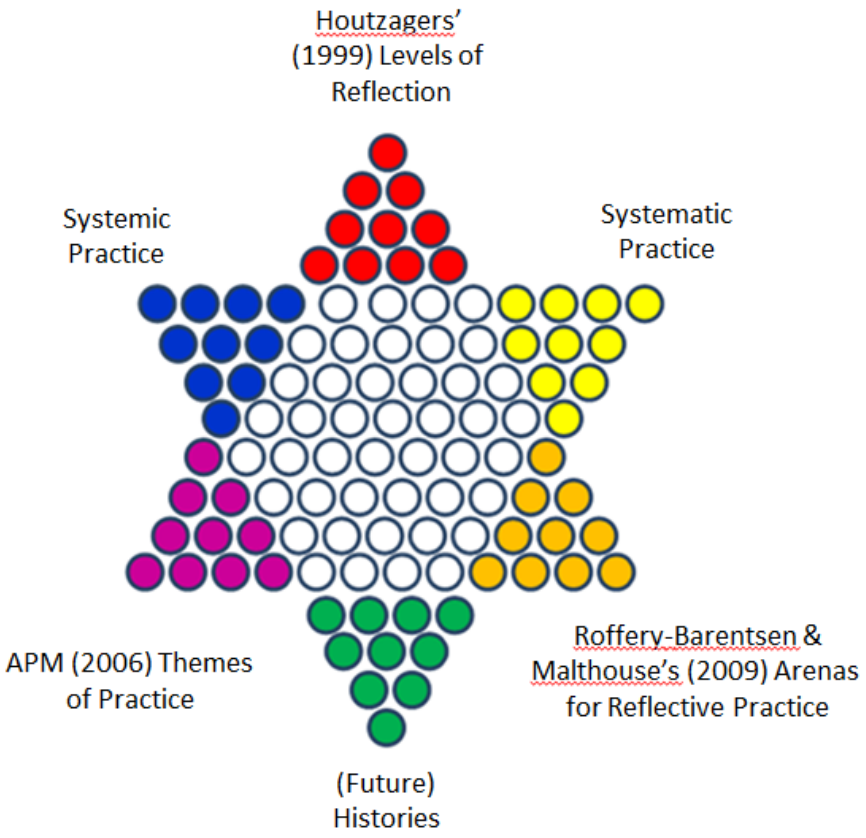


Figure 45: Arenas of Writing
Source: author

The representation of these possible arenas for reflection is illustrated as a Chinese checkers board. This metaphor draws attention to the tension that exists between writing about systemic and systematic ideas and writing as a practical authorship that contrasts the desire to create our futures alongside our desire to engage in reflexive inquiry. Such a representation aims to provide a rounded view on the content, context and process of the learning without being too constraining.

In summary this section has illustrated the range of learning that is documented by the students during their dissertation phase. It has identified an inclination towards the representation of learning as being situated within deficit based situations. In addition, it is apparent that the nature of these problems lies in the social dimension(s) of the student practice rather than on their technical (project management) skills. However, the area that seems most significant to me as an educator is the level of reflection where the analysis indicates a focus on the efficacious resolution of a single learning moment rather than an inquiry into patterns of professional activity.

8.6 Alumni Interviews

The third research project I undertook was to interview 10 alumni from the MSc in Project Management. The aim of the interviews was to appreciate more thoroughly the lived experience of the students once they had graduated from the course. The interviews focused on what was it they were doing when they realised they were acting as a project manager.

In adopting an approach that placed the emphasis on the students to undertake their own sense-making I chose to act in a non-directive fashion. Whilst this could have been inefficient (i.e. the possibility of having either sections of an interview or a whole interview that was 'off track') I was placing my confidence in the idea that the project managers themselves would be better placed than I to assert what was legitimate or insightful. This choice was productive because the interviews provided a wide range of experiences that flowed further than the constraints of the Body of Knowledge or the curriculum of an academic programme.

Having adopted a broad perspective as to what was legitimate during the interview stage I then sought to draw meaning from this diverse data set through

a systematic analysis. The analysis of the interviews was undertaken using Flanagan's Critical Incident Technique (1954) and Hycner's guidelines for the analysis of qualitative data (1985). In undertaking this analysis I identified twenty-nine subjects that occurred in the interviews. These were grouped into seven broad themes covering communications, team processes, adaptability, ethics, project management tools, reflexivity and external relationships.

In choosing to report these subjects I chose to move away from the straightjacket of labels (e.g. communications) and into a metaphorical representation of the data that may stimulate curiosity and evoke a richer imagery of the practice of project management. These metaphors contrast the world of the project manager as living on a dimension polarised by the technocrat and the pragmatist. This rational worldview is subsequently fractured by three social dimensions that see the world of the project manager as thriving in the domains of 'hard' and 'soft' power as well as emotional labour required to support the team processes. The metaphors that I chose to represent these dimensions were, as previously mentioned, the project manager as an artisan, a *bricoleur*, an ambassador, a politician, and a champion. However, rather than having these as defined roles of a project manager I see these as subtle positions that can be changed in a moment, rather like the patterns of a kaleidoscope being altered by a slight twist of the wrist (see Figure 46, overleaf).

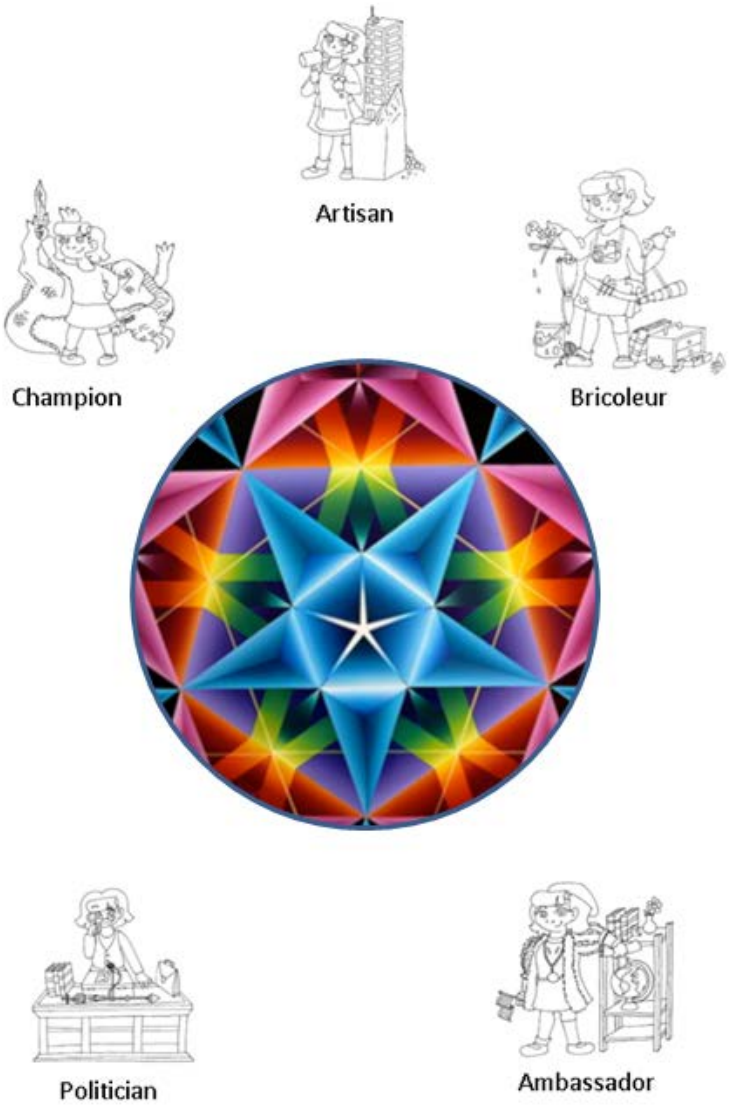


Figure 46: Kaleidoscope of Practice

Source: Graham (2011e) adapted by author

In choosing the term artisan I focus on the deployment of the artefacts of the profession. As a doctor can be recognised by the public display of a stethoscope or a judge by their wig then the project manager can be recognised by their use of the Gantt chart or Earned Value graph. Consequently, this dimension presents the ways in which the individual's identity as a project manager is created and maintained through their ability to wield the tools of their trade. Likewise, an absence of these artefacts of project management may create dissatisfaction as

the individual may feel that their identity is being eroded and they are not exercising the craft that they chose to specialise in.

In contrast to the image of the artisan, the *bricoleur* is a master of improvisation who creates out of the available resources. Consequently, this dimension explores how the project managers have to be adaptable and work with what is at hand rather than the specified practices, methods or tools declared by the professional bodies. However, it is more than this, as at the heart of the original French term is a notion of fiddling or tinkering rather than a systematic approach. Therefore the project management *bricoleur* needs to be adept at responding to nuances in the context rather than just playing it by the book.

The dimensions of Artisan and *Bricoleur* are not intended to be polar opposites but complementary perspectives to understanding the actuality of practice. The skilful project manager is seen to weave between these perspectives in the everyday practice rather than occupy one in all situations. This subtlety is also evident in the manner in which they reside in the social and political dimensions of projects. As projects are socially constructed through the dynamic relationships between organisation, client, stakeholders and project team, the ability to survive in a 'political' world is essential. In this respect I am specifically considering the manner in which there are competing world views, temporary organisational structures, emerging coalitions, vested interests and hidden agendas, different sources of power and ethical sensibilities, all of which are at play in a project environment. To weave through this jungle the successful project manager needs to be both a proficient ambassador and a skilful politician.

In naming the perspective of the ambassador I am representing the 'soft' power of the project environment. In this world the project and the project manager are seen as being one and the same where the project manager becomes the living embodiment of the project. In my own world I see this in the way that

people will refer to the MSc in Project Management as “Ian’s course” and similar processes of attribution are evident in professional project management practice. For example, this is often seen when disgruntled stakeholders are looking for a scapegoat for a project failing. In naming this perspective I am also recognising the influence of Holbein’s picture (see Figure 45, below) on my intellectual development.

Figure 47: The Ambassadors by Holbein
Source: http:www.nationalgallery.org.uk

Holbein’s picture represents to me a moment of clarity in its depiction of the systematic world and the systemic world. Through the use of the scientific artefacts such as the globes, the quadrant and floor mosaic the triumphs of the systematic world are portrayed. The main characters in the painting representing church and state depict the key sources of power at the time and they stand adorned in their robes of office. However, throughout the picture the systemic discord is evident with the broken string on the lute, fine plumb line in the centre

of the picture and the dramatic anamorphic skull. This tension between the systemic and systematic perspectives speaks to me in my practice and compels me to continue my systemic journey.

Returning to the main theme of this section, the perspective of the politician illustrates the more formal deployment of power resources that the project manager can call upon. This perspective recognises the rich political landscape that project managers have to work in. Often, as part of temporary organisations that are seeking to change the status quo, projects can become immersed in organisational (and personal) conflict. To flourish in such a system, project managers need to be able to appreciate the context, identify the open and hidden agendas and to create a temporary coalition of stakeholders in order to destabilise the current and bring forth the new.

The final perspective, the champion, articulates the emotional labour that the project manager expends in their drive for project success. This representation is aligned to the mythical stories of the hero. In these stories the champion is the representative of the community. They are the ones who are selected to protect the community often at their own expense. In a similar way the project manager often becomes the champion of the project; protecting the project and the team from external threats, resolving team conflicts and giving people the resources, ability and confidence to achieve what they once thought was impossible.

In selecting these headings I was conscious of the dynamic interplay between the different dimensions: the paradoxical necessity to be a sophisticated artisan in order to be a subtle *bricoleur*, the overlap between dimensions in the ability to excel as a *bricoleur* as well as a politician and facilitating the movement between dimensions depending on the context. I was keen to consider the dimensions as being non-hierarchical, that is it is not perceived to be being 'better' to be a *bricoleur* rather than an artisan. To represent these considerations the metaphor

of a kaleidoscope is used to articulate a dynamic and organic practice that breaks free of the mechanical constraints of a rigid codification of practice.

8.6.1 The Project Manager as Artisan

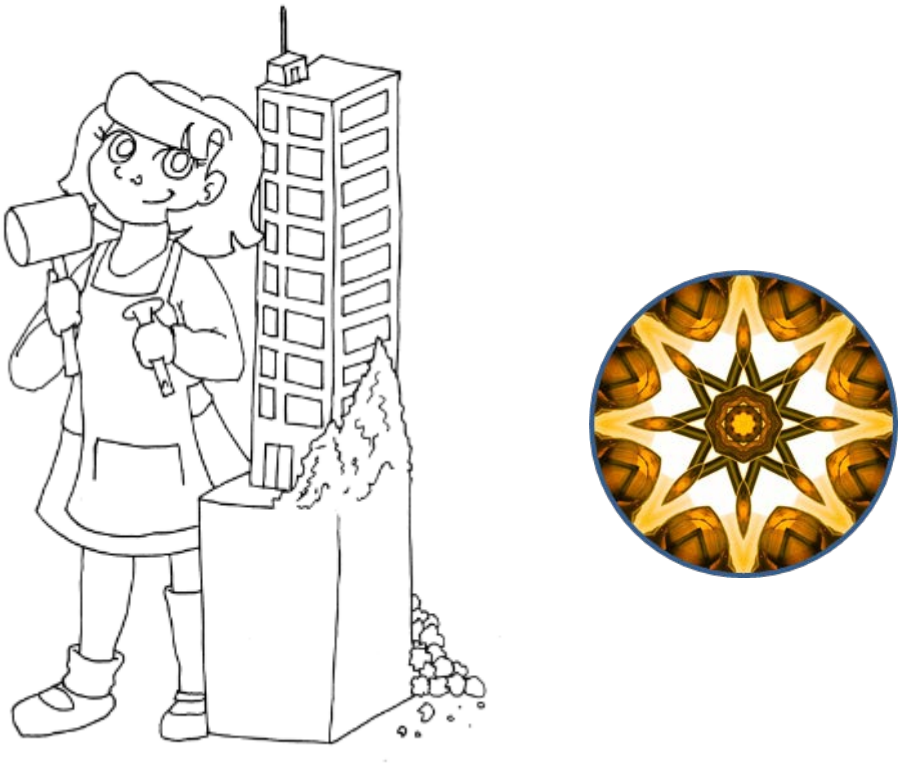


Figure 48: Project Manager as an Artisan
Source: Graham (2011e)

In speaking with the project managers the tools and techniques of project management were seen to be significant from a number of perspectives. As well as their practical value in forward thinking they were also identified as a symbol of who a project manager is and a way of gaining confidence in professional practice.

This symbolic value is demonstrated in Margaret's initial experience in her organisation:

> It was really small, there were about six of us in digital so it was a really small team and so it was 'all hands on deck' to everything and then my role sort of turned into basically, almost like a production manager, for doing e-mails and banners and I was doing that for about a year and a half when I thought "Right, this isn't what a project manager should be!" This isn't my idea of a project manager. It was business as usual all the time.
>
> Margaret

This experience contrasts to her current role, where she feels that she is a project manager. Outlining her current key responsibilities Margaret states that:

> I am responsible for doing the project plan and the budget for [each] of the projects and then making sure that it's kept to…. [I am also] responsible for resourcing, for all of the people that are going to be working on that project.
>
> Margaret

Jasmine likewise asserts that the use of the 'professional' tools gives her a "sense of confidence" because of their ability to create a "systematic way of viewing the project" (Jasmine). This ability to create and share a view of a unique endeavour is crucial to Jacinata's role where she was involved in

the project management of infrastructure projects on behalf of international donor organisations:

> We are initially the first project managers of the project before they actually branch out into a project implementation unit. So we have to co-ordinate everything and set it in a way that the line ministries can then take those services that we offer and turn them into implementation units to hire staff to then actually do the work to get these projects completed. So after we do that we are still responsible for checking in with the projects and the project managers and also we are responsible for supporting their requests for payment. So we still have to make sure that things are OK and according to EC procedure in order for them to get their money.
>
> Jacinata

Contrasting to this empowering ability, one of the project managers expressed a sense of guilt about not really contributing to the project:

> I really do find that one of the hardest things about being a project manager is that I feel that I don't do anything. I mean I know that I do things that I do, like I do in inverted commas 'the plan and the budget and proposals and resourcing' and things like that but I don't actually build anything or design anything. So I feel, I feel a bit guilty sometimes if I leave and some of the people, well my project

> [team] is still there. So I tend to stick around, even if I am not actually working on the project, I tend to stick around, show a bit of solidarity …
>
> Margaret

Marzug also speaks of the power of his application of the project management toolkit as central to his role. His deployment of Earned Value has placed him in a core position with respect to reward and employment opportunities. He described the transition:

> [The contractors foremen are saying] ”What does this 23 year old now want from us? We always used to work like this and that. Why [do] you want to come and do this? We’re OK before! “ But then later when people started to be about OK with what I was doing …they would say I [Marzug] know now how I can improve the productivity on site I told them,
>
> ”OK, just trust me and then we’ll see”.
>
> People you know are waiting for a bonus. OK, so I told them ‘Uh-uh, here’s the performance …we’re spending a lot on this activity; we’re spending a lot on these items … Bear in mind that if we continue like this *No bonus’* So people you know
>
> ”Oh no, no, no, what, no bonus, no?“
>
> Marzug

Later this position of power, to forecast which teams would be able to meet their targets was increased when the tool was deployed to adjudicate whether a team should be kept in position or a new one recruited.

[Marzug, speaking to an in-house team:] That here is a red light now and if you're going to continue like this [there will be] no bonus and we will have to kick you out and then bring something else in, something like to give this activity to a sub-contractor.

They said "Ok, no problem, we will improve"

We gave them like one month. We didn't tell them you have one month but we kept things as it is and I start[ed a] new monitoring and I realised that the productivity is still the same, no improvement, so I told my manager. OK, my manager took his time to take the decision but at the end he took it.

[The manager said] "OK, I will bring a sub-contractor and then I will let them, give them a little bit of work on site to do".

Then the sub-contractor came and he, they, did a good job. I monitored their performance. I applied Earned Value but for them and for our teams. Then we compared the productivity and then their productivity was far better so we had to reduce some [of] the labourers, kick them out, you know, from this and this happened you know … the site was,

> "'Oh what's happening, you know, like, the sub-contractor coming, if we continue like this I think all the projects is going to be sub-contracted, we don't have any more jobs"
>
> You know, people they [were] afraid. Productivity improved. We removed the sub-contractor.
>
> Marzug

Contrasting to the explicit use of the project management tools a number of the project managers found that formal deployment of the tools was missing from their practice, or part of their practice. The linkage between the project management tools and selection of projects was apparently missing for Jacinata:

> We are managing about 48 projects but I don't know if it's done deliberately but our project manager he really functions as a projects officer and there's no real system in place for how people get projects added to their portfolio … there is no process of how things move from a policy to a strategy … it's really chaotic.
>
> Jacinata

At times, the deployment of the project management toolkit was hindered by stakeholders involved in the planning processes. Jasmine recounts how it was difficult to compile a consolidated plan from the individual plans with over forty project teams because they were reluctant to plan in detail. Explaining that this was partly a cultural issue, "Chinese plans are usually abstract and the responsibility is not very specific" (Jasmine) and a political

issue “many of the assumptions were not approved by the big bosses” (Jasmine).

In a similar fashion Michael admitted that occasionally he would deploy the tactical toolkit but lose sight of the ‘big picture’ and the reason for the work:

> We sat down and mapped out what we were going to do, how we were going to do it. In doing it [the planning], we went into so much detail we actually completely missed the point of what we were trying to do …”
>
> Michael

A final observation on the role of the explicit use of project management tools was made by Jacinata. Commenting on the situation where one person is responsible for planning but execution is carried out by another person she says:

> It feels as if you are starting a project off, making commitments, making plans that you give to someone else and you don’t know until when it comes back to you how much has been done and how much hasn’t been done and then pressure gets put onto yourselves because the government ends up having to pay for things that, initially it was planned that the EEC was going to pay.
>
> Jacinata

8.6.2 The Project Manager as *Bricoleur*

Figure 49: Project Manager as a *Bricoleur*
Source: Graham (2011e)

Maria was focussed on an inherent contradiction in her emerging practice, i.e. the ability to apply the professional knowledge to her actuality. She concurred with the interviewer's summary that "the paradox is that you recognise them as projects but the standard toolkit doesn't fit" and went on to say:

> I don't know if it's a matter of the company's size or the project size. I know that it wasn't anything new for us but it was impossible to follow every meeting

> with minutes and acceptance, all the minutes, it was impossible to do all the paperwork that proper project management would require.
>
> Maria

She recognised that whilst they "finished the project in excellent circumstances and excellent references … it was just a mess going through [it]" (Maria). A key aspect of this "mess" was the fluctuating resource manpower requirements required by the main contractor and she illustrates this as follows:

> We would have a meeting at 09:00 in the morning for what our foreman would have to do for the rest of the day … By lunchtime, around 12:00, we would receive a call saying that they are doing something different.
>
> Maria

This inherent need for flexibility and adaptability was identified by Michael as key to his enjoyment of the role as a project manager. Contrary to the belief that a project manager will be able to control their world through a robust plan Michael asserted that the great thing about his role (as a project manager in a defence contractor) is "…the freedom. You are not tied to a desk. … To be honest, every day of my life I come to work I haven't a clue what's going on when you walk through the door". He believes he is not alone in this, asserting that:

> 99% of project managers love fire-fighting, it's the rush. I feel that I work best when there are more issues [to resolve] than I do when there is just, as I

> would call it 'I would want more work'. I think I switch off. I think I lose concentration; I find it hard to focus on anything. You tend to generate lists for lists sake because you push the stuff to the bottom, you [are] waiting for something to come along … whether it be an investigation or a bid or the boss is getting excited or something's happened … most people I talk [to] enjoy the fight.
>
> Michael

The flexibility in the role of project manager came through in Margaret and Jasmine's interviews as well. Margaret expressed a concern about the 'lack of [project] structure' in her early career. Jasmine also focused on this lack of structure. In her role, liaising between forty planners to draw together a strategic overview of the project where she found that the experienced planners were often reluctant to make explicit their ideas and their plans as they "usually depend on their past experiences and didn't feel the need to develop detailed plans" (Jasmine).

In recounting her early practice, Catherine recalls how she sought to apply all of the learning from her MSc in a great leap forward. This desire to do the right thing received, in her words, "some form of push back" and the project stalled before being shelved when the project sponsor and Catherine changed their organisational roles. Looking back on the experience she reflects:

> I know [that] I had not done myself any favours with the first line [managers] in terms of how I was applying the PM tools and techniques. Not

> everyone had a PM understanding, or wanted it to be so rigorous.
>
> Catherine

A couple of years later a change in the organisational context saw this project being resurrected and Catherine was, again, appointed as project manager. However, this time around she was more adaptable in her professional practice.

> I cannot apply hard and fast project management in my role. I need to tailor it [project management] and the persuading and influencing in terms of giving them an example rather than saying this is how we are going to do it.
>
> Catherine

Catherine demonstrates the systemic approach to project management through tailoring of tools to the context but also in her flexible approach to key stakeholders. She recalled a recent conversation with a senior manager that started with them inquiring:

> "I bet we are so different to work with. How do you manage us?" So I was able to say, "One of you likes loads of information so I just give it to you and leave you to it. Another one has a PM background and does whatever we ask and works through it with us. One of them just delegates it to her first line and the other one we call the 'talking bullet points' it has to be quick and easy and [we] give him what he needs to do and […] hold his hand as he walks

> through the process because he is not so confident in doing it.
>
> So 4 different approaches for 4 different people and we have to respond to it".
>
> Catherine

This time around the project is running smoothly. Catherine has to work at a level of project management application that aligns with the (managed) stakeholders' perception of project management maturity without overloading staff. She is still challenged that some of her ideas are, as she puts it, "Too much Catherine!" and subsequently, needs to find a more subtle and contextual approach to manage the process. However, her experience and adaptable approach provides encouragement to other practitioners who are concerned, as Maria was, that project management may lack the flexibility to work in a wide variety of different contexts. The trick appears to be being professionally adaptable. To conclude this section in Catherine's words:

> One of the things I am learning from project management is the ability to bring in the necessary capabilities and skills together to deliver something. Not to think you are going to be the 'be-all' and the knowledge to deliver everything but knowing who you need to go to [in order] to make [things] happen.
>
> Catherine

8.6.3 The Project Manager as Politician

Figure 50: The Project Manager as Politician
Source: Graham (2011e)

Projects are socially constructed activities. They are envisioned in the mind of the client, developed through dialogue with stakeholders and brought to fruition by the project manager and their team's work. The dynamics and interactions between these parties create a rich political landscape full of positive attractions, creative tensions and temporary allegiances. Jacinata asserts that this landscape is so rich and influences her world more than she could imagine:

> It's nothing that I could have imagined and if you guys [the tutors at Lancaster] put these characters

> into like work we would say you're making these people up, it's really in bits.
>
> Jacinata

Jacinata was not alone in recognising the importance of this perspective. In exploring how political tensions impacted on her project management practice Catherine also articulated how her initial experiences to launch a project were hampered because the director's first line managers were "not properly bought in". Ababuo spoke about the tensions that exist within the coalition of stakeholders that are drawn together for her project "I have to make sure that all the activities are feeding into our objectives, the work being done, everybody is satisfied, … you can't satisfy everybody". Jasmine spoke of the frustration of her line manager when a senior stakeholder circumvented his authority to order her to undertake various tasks.

Sometimes these conflicts arise out of an organisations position or stance. Ababuo explains how the local communities "did not trust what we were doing. They knew we were working together with them but in the end, just like any other government organisation, they saw us as part of the problem" (Ababuo).

At other times the conflict rests in the individuals, for example Jacinata explains the tension between two individuals both employed as accountants because:

> Accountant two makes less money, controls more work and basically creates the situation where she controls all the information in the unit so even the project officer has to go through her to get the

> information … Accountant two was just like a menace to society. She walked around everybody, everybody needed permission from her to do everything. She would willing[ly] hold back information on projects that officers were responsible for, she was a favourite of the [senior managers] and had many things she owned personally that [were in fact donated to the organization]. They would give us like additional [computer] speakers and stuff …she would take these things home.
>
> Jacinata

However, as well as being seen in explicit challenges to the project manager, the role of politics has the potential to remain below the surface where it controls through the merest hint of its existence. For example, Jacinata recounts how her perception of the importance of this issue is actually holding back her practice:

> I see the organisational behaviour stuff coming into play … that's just trying to work within the existing structure because I get the feeling that the head of the unit has tried to make changes and it was not well received so if he is not able to make changes, then I am not going to suggest too much.
>
> Jacinata

Martin also expressed his surprise at the impact that politics have on his ability to perform a professional role:

> I didn't realize how political projects can be in a matrix organization. So you've got 12,000 employees in our organisation and the last thing I expected was politics to catch me out, and I had 1 or 2 experiences where they did.
>
> Martin

He goes on to describe how:

> Important stakeholders would come to site, would come and do a project review, so I would spend a day with the project team and they would go away nice and happy and then you would spend the next week unpicking a load of politics … they leave you happy: you think they're happy but when they cause a tsunami that comes back and a 30 foot wave of water, then it hits you head on as a project manager. … I think that it's about understanding people, understanding politics in the organisation, it's understanding relationships in the power circles and how they all behave, what tunes to play with them … and that's a never-ending, a never ending journey.
>
> Martin

In considering their personal responses to these challenges the project managers adopt different styles. Jacinata asserts that:

> [I am] as professional as possible [with accountant two] because I realised that if you are not prepared to deal with her sometimes she is a bit standoff-ish

> and she'll ask you like, "what are you talking about?" And if you can't escribe specifically why and what you're looking for then she would tend to kind of embarrass you.
>
> Jacinata

In a similar way Jasmine tries to defuse tense situations with her demanding stakeholders through a process of expectation management. For example, when she has to produce a (draft) presentation to a senior colleague that he will deliver to an international organisation, she takes great care to explain:

> It is not the final product and that we know it can be further improved and would like to listen to his comments before going too fast [and to try] to bridge his expectation and our deliverable.
>
> Jasmine

However, when the 'tsunami' strikes, Martin acknowledges that he "goes quickly into child mode and everybody's a bastard, everybody's fault but yours and that for a couple of weeks I [Martin] was not motivated" (Martin). He goes on to explain that this extreme response was triggered because:

> I felt that my integrity was being challenged and I felt that there was a layer of trust, a layer of trust that had been taken away because they were having to ask these questions and my initial response was again child "so you don't respect me either" and so that wasn't really helpful … So you go

> down [as] a child, lose motivation and after a while you start to think about the change curve, you start to think about what I need to do to get out of this. Am I in denial?, Have I done something wrong?, Do I need to change my approach? and How do I find solutions?. So you start tapping into different people and asking for different points of reference and its quite interesting when you are in a project environment that I was in because the team was quite close and the team were all like "Just tell them to bugger off. We are doing a good job" and they could not see the importance of this tsunami because the fish were on the beach, flapping around and the waves, you could see the wave out in the distance, just sat there waiting to come and hit.
>
> Martin

In this scenario Martin felt he had to enact a sense-making process for the whole project team to bring them back to a collective positive frame of reference. Following a meeting with his manager and the senior managers at corporate headquarters he came back to discuss the issue with his team:

> When I came away from headquarters, came back to talk to the team about what we were doing I was honest with the team and the feedback that I gave them was this is just politics. This is senior managers in the organisation having a go at one another. So you had one group trying to sell the organisation which was broken [redacted]

[redacted] and another part of the organization trying to fix it and there's a bit of tension in there and rightly or wrongly I got caught between the two things. Now my response in the initial, where I got initial feedback which was my boss saying 'What the hell have you said? It's been escalated, all out of control, blah, blah'. My initial response was to react and I didn't need any of this critical instrument techniques stuff. I just went into caveman child and on reflection I could have nipped it in the bud that evening and made it nothing by just taking some time to think about what is being said, what are the politics, what does the [stakeholder] globe look like in terms of influences … being a bit more mature I guess, just understand the business tension, all the drivers between the two different parts of the business. I could probably extinguish the whole thing but instead I spent a good two weeks probably, being pretty pissed off, dragging down the whole team.

Martin

An important subsidiary to the political role of the project manager is their ethical response to challenging situations. Whilst this can be experienced across a variety of contexts such as the pressure a team is working under, individual relationships and contractual dilemmas, their ability to disrupt the project and challenge the self-schema of the project managers is a real pressure for these professionals.

Jacinata recounts how ethical dilemmas can emerge in project management practice. Recalling how a contractor was paid twice (an extra US $50k) for a work package and was refusing to return the fees. The consultant was asserting that they were due to her because she had not been paid for another segment of work that was produced by her but not approved by the client. In this scenario Jacinata sees the dilemma between the contractor expecting payment for all her efforts whilst the organisation is only wanting to reward her for the work completed to specification. Jacinata can see how her organisation may have contributed to the situation:

> That relationship was not managed properly. I don't think her terms of reference were clear on what was expected from the consultant so after producing deliverables they weren't accepted and they held back payment.
>
> Jacinata

In addition, she sees how individual personalities may have exacerbated the situation:

> The 'terror' accountant, she was very rude to the consultant and so things kind of got out of hand on a personal level and now it's this. We're not going to get that money back unless we take her to court.
>
> Jacinata

Jacinata was not the only person to witness these challenges and to experience them on a personal level. In her early experience as a project manager, Maria faced a number of ethical dilemmas associated with the

tendering for contracts. At one level she found that the choices and decision that she assumed would be open to her company were in fact closed because the specifications issued stated the suppliers of the services. This left her with a feeling that it was "basically about who you knew and not what you know" (Maria) and that her ability to deliver value to the client was being constrained by the client's preference for working with predefined suppliers (and products). Occasionally, this discomfort was intensified when she found that the tenders were written to "such a tight specification that you did not stand a chance to win […or the] common practice" (Maria) where a corporate customer would wait to the eleventh hour before asking for a ten percent reduction in price. Maria also hinted at more suspicious activity asserting that her company had missed out on an opportunity to tender due to 'mysterious' circumstances. She recounts how on one occasion:

> We gave them our specifications …about 3 months ago and we were waiting for their phone call to tell us "OK, the specifications are out please pick up your documents and give us your quotation", which never happened. So when we called them about [it] … they told us "Oh nobody called you, well the quotation has been out and the deadline has been missed".
>
> Maria

On another occasion she asserts that:

> …I know that for securing that first project, the first phase of the [redacted] project some people got much benefit of it and in the second phase when, where I was involved and I did not know anything

> about these things, we just didn't get a chance to get the documents.
>
> Maria

The learning that she has taken from these situations includes a commitment to "take nothing for granted and just be there whenever you have to be there" (Maria). It also raises some on-going debates for personal practice where she is committed to growing her family business "I'll do whatever it takes, in my way, I'll take it to my limits and I definitely won't just let it go" (Maria). Whilst being aware that there is an ethical boundary "sometimes you have to get 'unethical', um, as much as you want or for as far as you can take it" (Maria).

A contrast to this position is articulated by Martin. Despite living in the flux of an organisation that was under pressure from regulators and potential investors he was very adamant that he clearly follows an ethical code:

> I am an honest man. I live by honest values, integrity, honesty … I can't think of anywhere where I've lied or used an untruth in a professional capacity to get something done on a project. I think we have had discussions and we have to agree to disagree and then I've used power and influence to get things done, but would I lead someone down a path and them not realising where they were going?
>
> Martin

8.6.5 The Project Manager as Champion

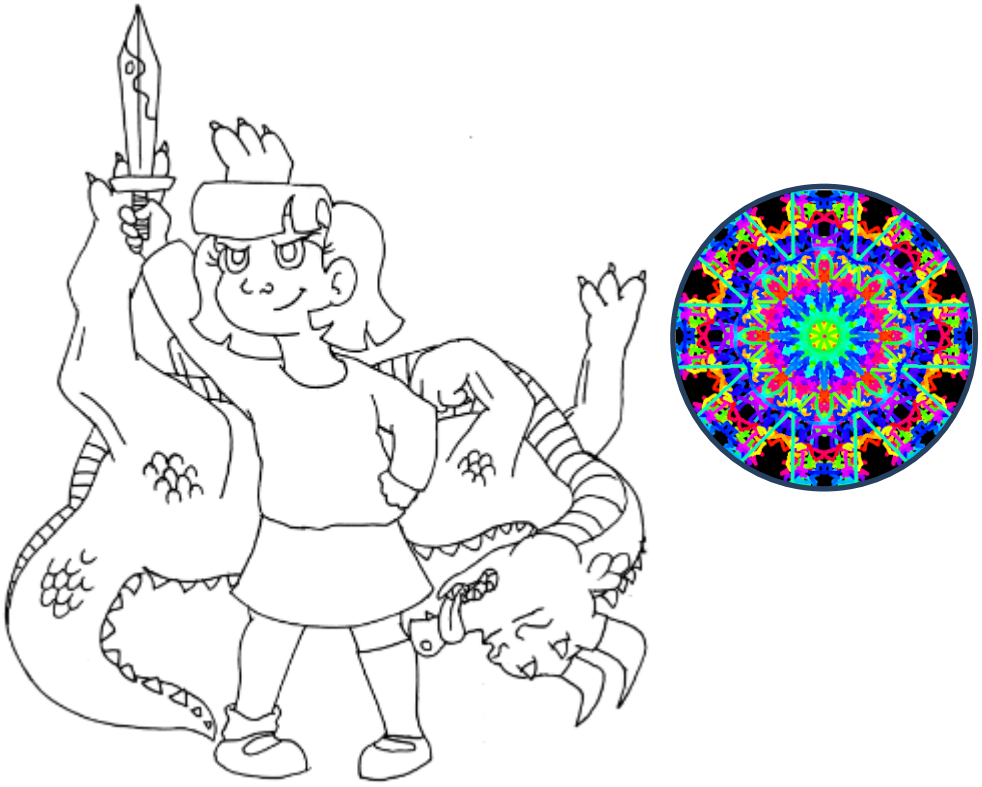


Figure 51: The Project Manager as Champion
Source: Graham (2011e)

The notion of the champion as the winner or the self-serving hero is not meant to dominate this discussion. Rather I use the term to mean a person who stands up for a community and who is working for the greater good of this community.

> Fundamentally I find that project management is all about managing people…above everything else you can learn and you have control over.

Jacinata

The criticality of the team, and the ability of the project manager to maintain this focus was highlighted by Margaret who expressed her team's dislike for ambiguity or conflicting pressures on their time. "They don't mind which one [task] it is, they just don't want to be pulled in two directions at the same time" (Margaret). Remembering a quote she had recently heard she stated that "You can cut a plum in half but you still lose some of the juice" and went on to describe how this need for focus in her team was a key tension in her practice:

> I think that obviously project management and the processes involved in it do sort of clash a little bit with creativity. So, for example, I have a project that needs to go live tomorrow but the designer is still making tweaks to the build website so I've found that I try to allow the creative space, allow them space to be creative and then the more smoothly I can get my processes running the more space I can give them, if that makes sense. So, I think that the two seem like they clash because one's process and one's creative but they actually go hand in hand. If one works well then it allows the other to work well.
>
> Margaret

To provide this creative space Margaret draws on an agile project management ethos to keep outside distractions to a minimum as a key part of her role:

> A project manager's role or part of their role was to block anything from their resources, to protect your resources so that they're just able to get on and do the work and nothing gets in the way. So no-one comes over and asks them those questions all the time; interrupting them and no-one wants them to work on a different project. So that part of me kind of protects my resource which means I can then get my project done on time because they're working on it when they should be.
>
> Margaret

Michael also demonstrated a focus on the core needs of his project team explaining that "if the managing director gives me a call and the girl that is picking the stock in the stores for the order gives me a call then I go to see her first because her need is greater than his" (Michael).

Michael highlighted the difficulty in successfully keeping balance in the project team

> It's a tougher job than people give people credit for. I look in the guys that work, the operations guys, and they just want to work. They just want to do the work. If you haven't set the project up so that they have got the right bits at the right time […then] the customer's not got what he wants … if you're not delivering the right margin, the boss is back down on you. So for me it is constantly trying to

> balance the problem and the problems [become] manifest in people, process, product.
>
> Michael

Whilst Margaret and Michael focused on the need of the project manager to provide a clear focus on the goal of the project and free the team up to deliver the results, some of the other project managers focused more on the complexity of team behaviours.

Martin focused on the varying levels of motivation in the team and the need to develop a sustainable solution rather than rely on intense individual fire-fighting.

> Not everybody is motivated to that level so you've got to count that with the organization as well because I come along and I am full of energy and I just keep working and working and working and the organization can't work at the same pace.
>
> Martin

Martin goes on to express a belief in the motivation of individuals rather than the efficacy of a process.

> I think that in my own mind if you are a process driven individual you won't last in a project [environment] long. You've got to have a huge appetite for being successful and making things happen, whether its basket weaving or whether its building a new power station … unless you've got that appetite to make it happen it won't and you

> won't survive as a project manager. And that was quite an early dawning for me. When I look back I wonder why I didn't learn that at school, when I was fourteen or fifteen. Why didn't I realise that you need to 'own it'. Why did I sit there pointing and blaming and waiting for others?
>
> Martin

In seeking to develop this element of his practice Martin is focused on an approach that he deploys called the accountability ladder.

> I thought you just used 'process' and so you've got a plan and you've got people to review it and that was it. [That] doesn't work and it is about how do you get people from unconscious […] I guess to the point of reality, to actually owning the solution and doing something with it. … As a project manager that was my biggest challenge because in a regulated industry, [redacted], a lot of people are about 'compliance' and they do things because they have got to do things. They don't do them because they want to do them. What I learnt on the back of the masters at Lancaster, one of the first things, it was about motivating and getting that buy-in, securing that buy-in.
>
> Martin

Often this need to motivate the team goes beyond the traditional constraints of organizational life. For Ohannes this is a motivation approach

that goes beyond techniques to be engrained in the personal relationships he has with the project team:

> It feels like I am part of them, they feel like I'm not that bossy guy. I'm not the business man who is always checking [up on them] or the project manager who is always checking and giving instructions and orders rather than just being like them […] let's all co-operate and do what's right.
>
> Ohannes

This cohesion was also identified by Michael as being a key part of his team's culture.

> When I am talking to these guys or they're talking to me we are all one and the same. We are part of a team. We're part of a business. We're part of a programmes group. We're part of a functional department. So to me there's nobody [that] stands out as more important than anyone else.
>
> Michael

Ababuo's experience pushes this relationship even further:

> How to motivate well is very challenging for me as well because you have limited resources and sometimes, well at the beginning of the year, people have gone into the field. They have not been paid and the money doesn't come from us. The money doesn't come from the organization so

> when that is not available then I pull in all my directors of the center and had a series of discussions with my team and …tried to explain that I had submitted all their claims and that the Commission is currently undergoing a crisis and that when that is resolved we have records of what everybody has done and everybody will be paid properly.
>
> Ababuo

Contrasting to these perspectives on teams Jasmine found that one of the key challenges in her practice was the composition of the project teams that she was working with. In her coordinating role she had to liaise with 40+ teams that were typically comprised of graduate level assistants who were keen to be involved in the project for a "once in a lifetime opportunity" (Jasmine) and more experienced middle managers drawn from government positions. However, Jasmine said that these middle managers were polarised between those who came seeking a promotion "because the organising committee had a higher headcount than their bureau or [they were sent by their home bureau because] they were not the best performer in their own organization" (Jasmine). In both situations the teams that she was interfacing with lacked the power to make decisions, needing to get "approval from the relevant government bodies or the senior management (e.g. mayors, governors or ministries)" (Jasmine).

8.6.2 The Project Manager as Ambassador

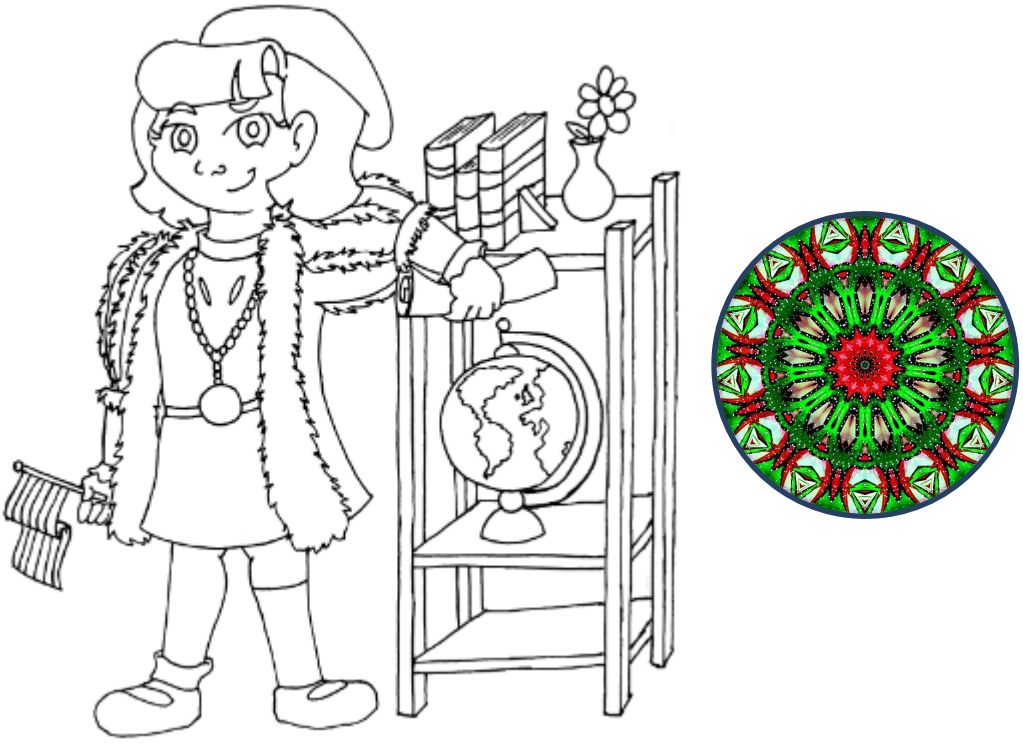


Figure 52: Project Manager as Ambassador

Source: Graham (2011e)

The importance of communication to the art of project manager was raised by the majority of the project managers. Catherine asserts her belief that "a massive part of projects is communication and I can always say I cannot underestimate this enough….it takes up a massive amount of time". Maria also identifies effective communications as being *the* critical difference in her practice.

> What makes a difference for us is number one the personal communication and relationship that you have with the people around you […] I don't know if

> it's a Mediterranean thing or a [redacted] thing or whatever. It really makes things easier to just get along and have the project in the best possible way.
>
> Maria

Placing the communication at the centre of her practice is challenging. As well as facing situations where it is "really not easy to just keep smiling" Maria needed to place herself at her client's disposal literally 24/7.

> It's very common here to have to give your mobile number out to your clients and I have clients actually, believe it or not … a priest who wanted to do [i.e. surface] a football pitch …calling me on Saturday nights at 9 o'clock and Sunday mornings at 6 o'clock.
>
> Maria

The range of stakeholders that the project manager is seeking to develop professional relationships with can be daunting. At the start of a new project, Martin said:

> [I] flushed out […]all the people [who] could, or all the groups or departments or companies who had an influence over the success of a project and that was quite an eye opener for me because I was "Bloody Hell … there's a lot of them!"
>
> Martin

This experience was shared with a number of the other project managers including Jasmine who was working as a programme coordinator which

required her to draw together plans from around forty teams, each comprising of at least three people, representing sixteen government departments and sixty-two functional areas such as transport, hospitality, events management, into a central document.

Catherine provided a concise portrait of the nature and impact of effective communications "You have to find the balance of them [the project team] hiding when they see you walking through the door, to helping them do it [the project]". In developing this idea further she explained that:

> For me the best project managers in the world are the ones who accidently bump into you to find out where you are with regard to particular projects […] who will use persuasion and influencing skills to get you to the 'hard and fast' areas that can potentially apply to your team.
>
> Catherine

This idea that effective communications is a contextually aware engagement that is the difference that makes a difference (Bateson, 1972) was one that Catherine had learnt on a previous project.

> I guess I learnt this off one of the guys on the failed project because he said to me "Where you went wrong last time was you came in and told me, 'You have to do this, you have to do that …' But I don't take my orders off you. I take my orders off my director".
>
> Catherine

In approaching communications in her current practice she is aware of the need to balance efficiency with effectiveness and that sometimes she had to go back “two or three paces to get them [her stakeholders] involved” (Catherine). In addition, she sought to develop individual relationships with each of her key stakeholders:

> I went about it differently in terms of how I worked with each of them separately. So rather than trying to tar them all with the same brush I tried to adopt my style to kind of mirror or reflect their style.
>
> Catherine

This focus was recognised and appreciated by these same stakeholders:

> During my [performance review] this year the people I had really pissed off last time made some really good comments about how I have approached it [the reworking of the project] and so even though sometimes it feels as if I am not getting as far as I would like to get I am getting as far as they want to get and that is the important part …and really, really knackering … the amount of anxiety and effort that goes into adapting your approach and finding a way to discuss it with these guys is quite draining.
>
> Catherine

This idea that the communications needs to be expressed in a fashion that is appropriate for the people you are seeking to develop a relationship with

is nicely illustrated in Ababuo's practice. Working on a variety of environmental projects at a local level:

> [Most of my stakeholders are] illiterate so most of them do not, aren't able to read and write but I realised that they are able to use pictures. If we make progress just show to them and then they will appreciate the work we are doing and … so I tried to adopt the social monitoring technique.
>
> Ababuo

However, occasionally the message that was communicated to the project managers for onward communication was not a positive one. Margaret expresses her appreciation of needing to structure the message to make it more palatable.

> I think that some of the high level people at our company are quite vocal in what we need to do. […] I feel like I'm a middle man between some of our directors and the actual, the one whose doing the work […] obviously I don't want to go and say [you've got to stay late until the work has been finished…] to them. I think I've got quite a good temperament for getting things done but saying it in a nice way.
>
> Margaret

Margaret illustrated this dilemma and her approach with a recent example:

> This particular one was a developer and a freelancer but we needed to get a website alive for the next day and it was already delayed so basically I asked him nicely if he would work the weekend and he, as it happens, didn't have anything on so we basically said "We'll get you in, all your food for the weekend, you'll have someone else there to support you with any bits that are tricky" and obviously we just agreed to pay him for that extra weekend. So it was all, it was sorted out but I just asked him nicely instead of saying "You have to" I said "I know you want to get this site live as much as I do. Do you think you'd help us out?"
>
> Margaret

The insights from Catherine (about pace) and Ababuo (about medium) could be expressed as the project manager relinquishing some of their power to create a more powerful co-constructed relationship with key stakeholders. Ohannes emphasizes the criticality of this relationship if the project is to succeed.

> I need to listen to them. I need to listen to the people because for God's sake this is their own organization and they are the best to talk about it and so I don't play the consultant here and you know the smart arse. It's painful because you get surprised. But guess what you are ready for it because you had [it] in mind once you give up the 'consultant hat'.
>
> Ohannes

This emphasis on listening paid off for Ohannes as he goes onto explain:

> I was more keen to ask questions, what he thinks the problem is about and how he visualizes the solution. How he thinks the problem can be tackled. I was asking questions and […] he saw that I cared about it rather than just delivering a particular service or selling the service because it is important to me.
>
> Ohannes

As part of this evolution of his role from that of an expert consultant to a being facilitative practitioner, Ohannes realized that a key aspect of his communication was the need to educate his stakeholders in the process of project management.

> Here in [redacted] you need to do a lot of education. Educating people on what project management is about and make it like, what can I say? Tangible for them to see the importance of using these methodologies. This level of thinking, this professionalism.
>
> Ohannes

For Martin the process of relationship building is centred on developing trust:

> It's about building some trust and repertoire with the various stakeholders … it's the Johari window

> thing[5] where you can share information to build relationships. Knowledge is power, knowledge is influence etc. so I look at people and think: What floats their boat? How do I get to really know what they are about?
>
> Martin

As part of his desire to build trust, Martin is keen to develop open professional relationships with his workforce as well as his suppliers. Acknowledging that a lot of project managers have "got big egos" and that it is easy to "take the feedback from the people that you were safe getting the feedback from" he is keen to develop the relationships that will facilitate honest feedback from a broad array of stakeholders.

> What I am finding is that if you go and talk to the right people in the right situations; so things like coming out on a night shift, if you've got people working on a night shift and go in the 'bait room' and talking to them in there in their environment and having that trust with them that they will tell you what the problems are. You can actually turn them round into solutions and as a project manager I think it helps your strategy. I think it helps your communications strategy and I think it helps your risk management strategy, getting inputs from the right level.
>
> Martin

[5] Luft, J. & Ingham, H. (1955)

As well as using this communication strategy with the internal workforce Martin also seeks to engage his suppliers in a productive dialogue:

> I do a lot more of that now, and it feels really uncomfortable when you go and talk to a vendor … [You've] given them a really hard time about pounds, shillings and pence. You tell him he's too expensive and then sit in a room and have a cup of coffee and say "Right, give me some honest feedback about what's going well, what's not going so well? You know what we are not seeing. How can we make us more successful?"
>
> Martin

Maria develops the idea further. To articulate how these communication relationships are co-constructed:

> I am more demanding because if you are following all this 'Mistakes are not allowed' so am I …. It's true. Really, I feel much more comfortable with … someone who won't be as rigid so it allows me to be comfortable … I've noticed that I'm more demanding [with people] from countries like Germany and Holland.
>
> Maria

The challenges of having an appropriate communication at the right time were highlighted by a number of the project managers. Margaret expressed

that this was a key part of her role, trying to get the team to communicate effectively:

> It's something that we have been trying to do here. So one of the main parts of my role as a digital project manager is to really get the designers and the experienced architects talking with the developers.
>
> Margaret

Maria raised the challenge of "messy conversations" during which the meaning was lost through the act of communication:

> That's where the communications were lost, totally lost, because then the instructions that you were getting from someone were different from the expectations that the other would have.
>
> Maria

Catherine raised a similar issue. At the heart of these "messy conversations" was the assumption that a colleague had been thoroughly briefed by his line manager.

> Kevin and I used to have these really weird conversations and it was only one day when I took out the project scope and went through it line by line when he went "Oh, am I responsible for that?" So John had not sat him down and explained to him his responsibilities. It was a bit of a realization on my part that with any project you

> need to take stock and any change of hands [e.g. delegation] you need to go back and remind them why you are doing that. […] I had assumed John had done that.
>
> Catherine

Combining metaphors to express her learning from this episode Catherine asserted that she should not "make [the] assumption that people will have Chinese whispered things along to others. Make sure it is coming from the horse's mouth" (Catherine).

Martin focused on the communication trap of email:

> One of the error traps is email, email is just a complete and utter waste of time, it causes more trouble, it is the root of all evil, it really is. So actually seeing the light in somebody's eyes, having the conversation, the understanding, and I use the word 'contracting' so make sure we have a handshake on whatever we have agreed, and you know through the body language whether you've got it or not.
>
> Martin

As well as recounting some of the communication issues experienced by project managers the interviews highlighted the political nature of communications. Jacinata recounted a conversation between her and her line manager:

> We get the work done. It's not 100% what it should be but sufficient for them to be pleased and you know, my boss calls me in and he's so excited. He's like "I went to the road. The road is going fine. You know we have enough to provide provisional acceptance and I was very tempted to take some pictures and send [them] to the guy in the delegation … you know why I didn't take pictures?" I said, "Your camera didn't have any batteries … I don't know" He said "Although it's nice when you win certain issues but it would set a bad precedent because you don't look at just what you are doing now but you look at what, how the decisions you make today impact other projects that come on stream. So it would be a bad precedent to send him pictures."
>
> Jacinata

Concluding this section on communications is the experience of Catherine who recognises the criticality of this systemic process:

> Communication is absolutely key, it is so important. So many people listen to you but they do not hear you and it takes so many times telling the same message before they actually realize what you are saying.
>
> Catherine

The ability of the project manager to overcome this communication gap is, in Catherine's world, absolutely essential because it is the route to a successful project.

> Knowing who your stakeholders are and knowing what influence they have on making that project fail (or succeed) and finding common scenarios; nuggets of information where it actually satisfies what they need as well as what you need. So you find the common ground […] you cannot push things onto people.
>
> Catherine

8.7 Alumni Interviews: Concluding Remarks

To conclude this section it is perhaps worth stating in their own words the project managers' accounts of the importance of project management education in their lives:

> Project management is a way of living …. it [project management] gives you this confidence, Ian, it makes you
> a better person because you are more confident.
>
> Ohannes

Ohannes goes on to enthuse about the relevance of his practice to the communities he seeks to serve:

> As part of your duty here, actually your basic task is to educate people first. And when I say people I

refer to client, I refer to your own organization staff / personnel. … The change management approach … has this magic effect on people. Once you give them the information, the knowledge, they start using it immediately so it's like people are ready for it Ian. But you have to educate.

Ohannes

I think one of the things Lancaster gave me was this ability to actually stop and reflect. I think it is quite an important thing to stop and look and think What is the problem? You know, What really is the problem? And that's not just what's on the piece of paper in front of you. Where did it come from? Where did it start? How did we get here?

Michael

They [his cohort set group] think I got the most out of the programme because I was a layman project manager. Yeah, [I] got things done, …. just driven ….didn't matter who got in the way, just got things done. Whereas now I am a lot more reflective [and] try to gauge people a lot.

Martin

8.8 Alumni Interviews: Discussion

In considering this analysis of the lived experiences of ten project managers I am drawn into a rich and complex picture describing the actuality of their practice. In essence the project managers do not see themselves defined by a single

expression of professionalism, such as the deployment of a Body of Knowledge, rather it is more contingent and in many respects more emergent than this. To sum up their actuality I am drawn to the pentagon of practice as being at the core of their practice.

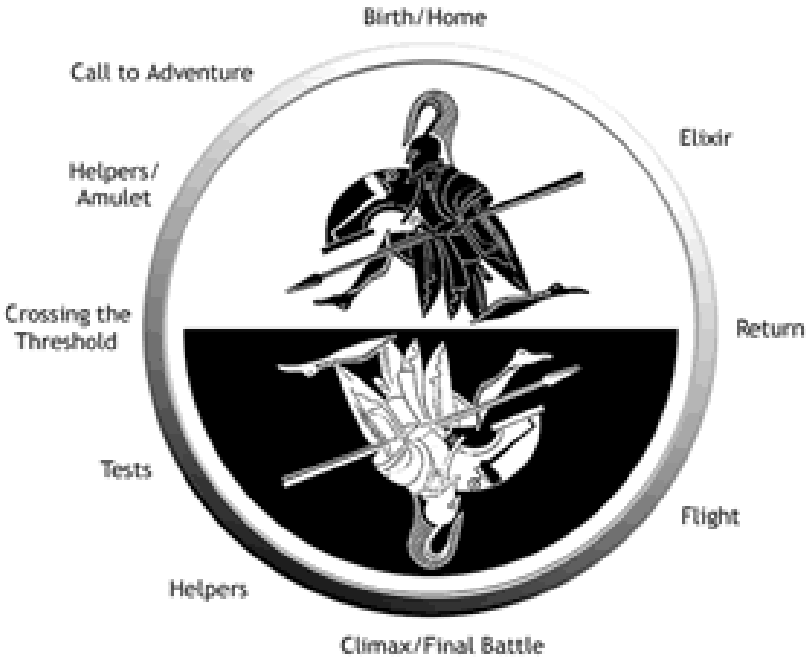
Another key observation from this level of analysis is the awareness that even with a couple of years of professional experience these practitioners do not see themselves as virtuoso performers in the strategies and methodologies of project management but rather as *bricoleurs*. They are adapting their practice to the context that surrounds them. Their personal ability to adapt a toolkit to the context is crucial to their success.

To be able to deploy such an evolutionary approach to project management requires the development and deployment of a rich array of social skills. Indeed a systemic mindset of seeking out connections between stakeholders, communicating with these in a rich array of methods and drawing on relationships to deliver new products and services to a wider and diverse audience appears to be at the heart of their experience. This systemic world is seen in the acts of communication, education, sense making and supporting that are an essential part of their practice. These acts connect the project managers to their project teams, their clients and the other internal and external stakeholders.

In the next section I will develop an integrated discussion of the three areas of analysis and feed this into a wider consideration of the issues surrounding action learning and reflective practice. The main purpose of this is to consider how the learning from the analysis described above can be fed into the MSc in Project Management in order to make the course more insightful for the students, and to make my personal practice more systemic in nature.

CHAPTER 9:

“ELIXIR”: CONCLUSION



9. "ELIXIR": CONCLUSION

9.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a synthesis of the two strands to this thesis and reveals key themes that have emerged through the analysis of my living theory and the empirical research into the students' lived experience as project managers. The revelatory nature of this chapter is grounded in the two key research questions that underpin the doctorate (see below) although the implications appear to go beyond my practice and offer insight to a wider range of professionals.

> **Research Question 1:** How do (or could) I as an educator draw upon the practices of systems and systemic thinking, action learning and reflective practice in order to create meaningful educational environments for project managers?
>
> **Research Question 2:** What is it that project managers recognise as being the critical moments of their practice and how does their lived experience inform my future practice?

This thesis has covered a significant amount of territory. It has covered my introduction to the practice of project management and education and my living theory which comprised of an account of SSM, action learning, reflective practice and systemic practice. I have also described my empirical research into the

accounts of practice created by the students in the dissertations and interviews. To share the diverse nature of the findings I will represent this new knowledge via a topography of practice laid down in a honeycomb pattern with three concentric circles. The first circle offers insights into a systematic world of professional practice that is, 'ways of knowing'. Around this systematic world there is a middle layer representing the insights associated to the social world of professional practice which I identify as 'ways of doing'. The outer circle presents the insights associated to systemic practice or 'ways of being'. In the new section I will summarise key findings under each of these headings before proceeding to describe the discourses that I see lying within this representation of professional development.

9.2 Ways of Knowing: The Systematic Zone of Practice

In the centre of this topography is a zone of systematic practice (see Figure 53) comprised of four key components and two themes of practice. This zone expresses the ways that we come to know of, and is about the 'fundamentals' of professional practice.

The components of our 'ways of knowing' drawn from my research are the belief in the rational world of project management practice, its underpinning theoretical concepts, and the development of professional toolkits together with the creation or commodification of knowledge products to support professional practice. Supporting these components are two themes of practice; the phenomenon of the project manager as an artisan and that of project management practice as an amulet.

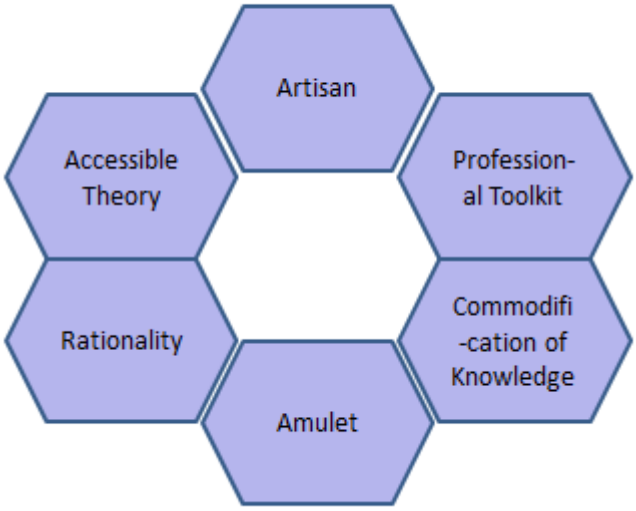


Figure 53: Ways of Knowing: Zone of Systematic Practice

Source: author

This zone of systematic practice is evidenced throughout the thesis. It is witnessed in the worldview of the professional bodies and their commodification of the knowledge necessary to deliver successful projects. The desire to legitimise the profession through the establishment of an underpinning theory of project management (Turner 2005, 2009; Kwak & Anbari 2009) reinforces this positivistic view of practice. The relevance of the systematic perspective is also demonstrated through the empirical research.

In the stories of practice I heard about Ian's desire to "set the end point in concrete" (Section 8.4.2.3), Catherine's rigorous approach to project planning (Section 8.6.2), Ioannis' application of a rationalistic performance management system (Section 8.4.2.4) and Lian's application of a formal reporting structure (Section 8.4.2.5). This systematic perspective matters to these practitioners and is seen as essential to them if they are to deliver a successful project.

Drawn out of these components are two key themes witnessed in the research. The first theme is the notion of the project manager as a master of a craft skill. The expert project managers create a project plan from various inputs such as information from stakeholders, company policies, and established project management practices. This plan leads to the successful delivery of a new product or service. Their peak performance in this domain of action is recognised by the theme of an artisan. The desire for peak performance is seen in Margaret's story (Section 8.6.1) which illustrates how her social identity is directly connected to the deployment of the professional toolkit. Elsewhere we hear how Marguz deployed an objective management system, Earned Value, which resulted in him being recognised as being a skilled practitioner by his co-workers and his manager (see Section 8.6.1).

Associated with this theme of the artisan is the notion of the amulet. In the same way that an amulet gives the necessary protection to the hero on their dangerous quest, a systematic approach to project management is perceived to protect them and their organisation on their project journey.

The belief that a systematic approach to project management will show someone what to do even when they do not know what to do needs to put into context. An overly rigid adherence to a rational approach to practice may turn the amulet into a 'poisoned chalice' as practice becomes myopic and constrained by a positivistic ontology.

This notion of a poisoned chalice was witnessed in Catherine's account of how her rigorous application of a project management toolkit had "not done her any favours" (Section 8.6.2) as the stakeholders rejected the imposition of a systematic approach to the management of her project. In a similar fashion my

rigid adherence to a content rich approach led to my 'tipping point'. Consequently it is argued that this zone of practice may be necessary but is not sufficient for the delivery of successful projects. The skills attributed to this zone of practice needs to be developed through a nuanced social approach to project management practice.

9.3 Ways of Doing: The Zone of Effective Practice

The call for a social practice of project management is supported by the accounts of practice described by the students. Their experience in the world of project management is dominated by social rather than systematic challenges. This is witnessed in their word clouds, the findings of the critical incident analysis and in the interviews. The key findings associated with this claim are shown in Figure 54, overleaf, and cover the professional's ability to understand, live in and learn from complexity.

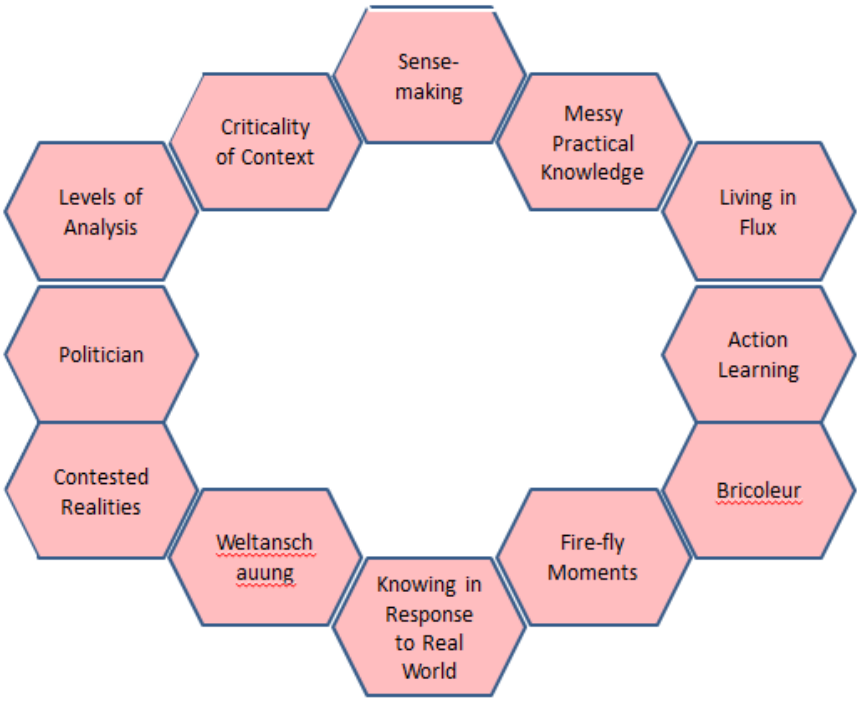


Figure 54: Ways of Doing: Zone of Effective Practice

Source: author

The professionals' ability to understand complexity is illustrated in four key activities in this zone. Namely, their ability to: appreciate the criticality of context; understand different worldviews (*Weltanschauung*); engage in sense-making and apply different levels of analysis to problem situations. These perceptive and cognitive abilities develop a richer appreciation of situations and are key skills in developing effective project management practice. They allow the project manager to move beyond the monomyth of systematic project management practice by understanding the context and culture that the project needs to live in.

The relevance of these talents is witnessed in the empirical research. I heard stories of the need to engage in ambiguous and complex situations from Hui

(Section 8.4.2.3) who was “lost in the fog” (Obeng, 1996) and unable to identify who the client was. Hui’s story is contrasted with Sophie’s who knew who her client was, but found that a broader understanding of the realities of the project was blinkered by her focus on this client’s requirements (Section 8.4.1). The research also uncovered stories of awareness such as Ioannis’ reflection on the different interpretations of leadership shared by Lian and himself (Section 8.4.2.1) or Martin’s understanding that success in project management lies in “understanding people … [understanding] politics in the organisation […] understanding relationships in the power circles and how they all behave” (Section 8.6.3).

This talent to perceive and understand a messy problem situation is largely an analytical ability and one that is different from the ability to be able to thrive in the complex situations. A second cluster within the zone of effective practice presents the talents necessary to live in the flux. These include the ability to embrace contested realities, to become a politician and to practise the art of project management as a *bricoleur* rather than an artisan. These findings embrace the notion that project management is not a detached ‘academic’ discipline but empirically engaged pragmatism. The empirical research is full of the energy created by this flux. I heard how Michael thrived on the urgency of action (Section 8.6.2) whilst Martin was nearly swept aside by his personal tsunami (Section 8.6.3). Elsewhere I witnessed Margaret’s account of being caught between the ‘creative’ and the ‘process’ driven individuals and Maria’s agility in responding to her client’s requests. The ability to harness this energy of a disparate group of stakeholders and channel it towards the goals of the project is one of the arts of the politician. This talent was demonstrated by Ababuo (Section 8.6.2) and Jacinata’s engagement with the “menace to society” (Section 8.6.3). Elsewhere I heard about Catherine’s skill in crafting the message to the needs of the audience (Section 8.6.2) and witnessed the politician’s skills in surviving the unpredictable as demonstrated by Martin (Section 8.6.3). A final

insight onto the political practice of project management was shown by Maria's resolve to do what is necessary right up to the boundary of what is ethically acceptable (Section 8.6.3).

Coupled with the political skill needed to manage the competing demands of stakeholders and team members, the art of living in the flux requires that the project manager is adaptable in the deployment of systematic tools. This ability to take what is available and use it to create what is needed is referred to as the art of the *bricoleur* (Section 8.6.2). The ability to have a flexible approach to professional practice intuiting the necessary steps to coax the project to a successful conclusion is a sophisticated form of practice. In a similar way to the skill of a jazz musician improvising, the art of the *bricoleur* is not based on chance but on an understanding of what works, derived from personal experience. This ability to move beyond a formulaic to a responsive approach to practice is also seen in the third cluster which speaks of the ability to learn from the real world.

In this third cluster of the 'ways of doing' four key abilities are identified. These are the ability: to create knowledge in response to the real world; to accept a world of messy knowledge; to learn from and within action and fourthly to appreciate 'fire-fly' moments of practice. The abilities to assimilate and translate experience into learning positions the professional as a sustainable practitioner. Their engagement in an on-going quest to develop professional practice is witnessed throughout the research. This journey is seen in Ai's struggles to make the work breakdown structure useful (Section 8.4.2.4), Maria's struggle with her ethical dilemma (Section 8.6.3) and Catherine's remodelling of her practice in order to make it acceptable to her organisation (Section 8.6.2).

Within this appreciation of learning as a key talent seen in successful project managers, the notion of the 'fire-fly' moment has been drawn out. This is an ability to appreciate and learn from moments of exemplary practice which are

placed in the topography as an aide memoire to avoid falling into a deficit based approach to learning.

The zone of effective practice presents components of successful practice that go beyond the systematic and into a nuanced social world of practice. Specific social practices have been clustered around three areas: understanding, living-in and learning from complexity. The ability to connect these aspects of professional practice to a systematic framework provides many practitioners with the skills and sensibilities with which to engage in a successful career. However, the research also demonstrated that there is something that differentiates exceptional performance from the competent. This is framed as the 'ways of being' and is a zone of transformational practice.

9.4 Ways of Being: The Zone of Transformational Practice

The outer zone of the topography articulates the elements of practice that are "the difference that makes the difference" (Bateson 1972). These insights transform a professional's practice from one that is systematically robust and socially orientated into one that is systemically informed. The range of practices that are embraced by the ways of being are shown in Figure 55, and cover the dialogical, relational and reflexive capabilities.

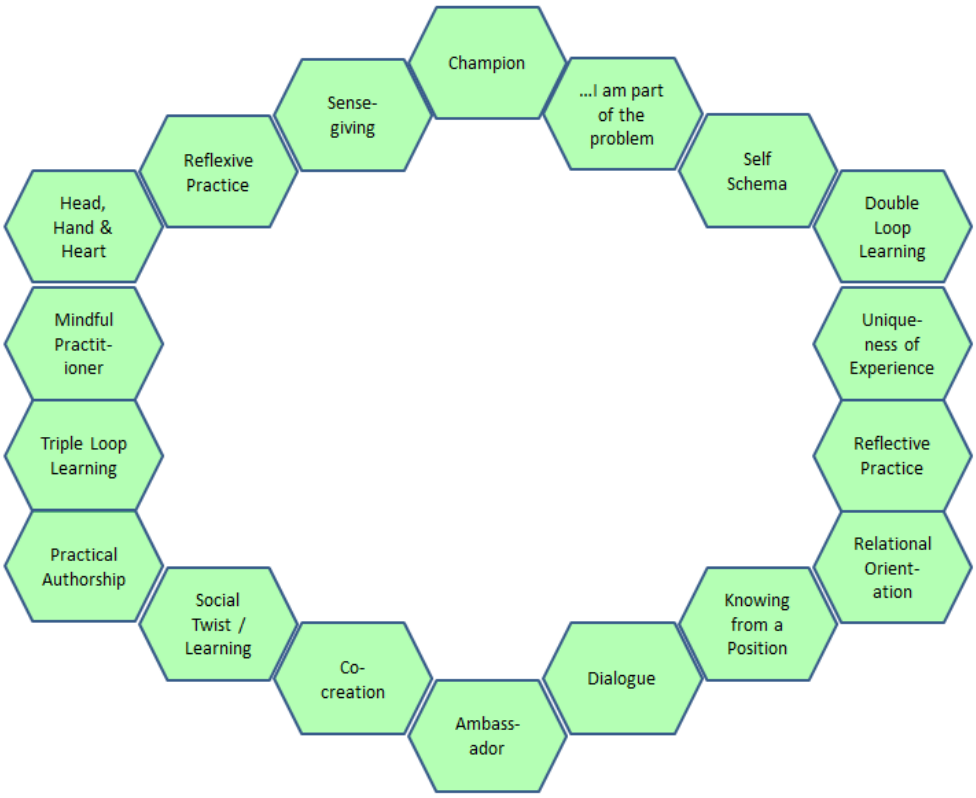


Figure 55: Ways of Being: Zone of Transformational Practice

Source: author

The dialogical talents encompassed in the ways of being include the abilities of co-creation, practical authorship and sense-giving. These abilities create a different style of engagement with the project stakeholders, one that is built on the systemic values. An example of this is the recognition of a more engaged style of communication as articulated by Emma's "one-to-nobody" incident (Section 8.4.2.2) and also witnessed in Catherine's personalised style of communication (Section 8.6.2), or Ababuo's visual communication style with her illiterate stakeholders (Section 8.6.3). Martin's conversations with his nightshift in the 'bait room' (Section 8.6.2) is yet another example of the ability to create a different style of engagement with the project stakeholders built on systemic values.

These capacities to engage in dialogue are a game changer for the world of project management. They transform the project from being a static objectified 'given' to something that is dynamic and is co-created in dialogue with the stakeholders. This is a form of practical authorship (Cunliffe 2002) that sees a reconstruction of our senses in understanding the requirements, constraints and context of the project. In addition, the sense-making that occurred in the dissertations as well as the interviews, also illustrates a shift from a static understanding about what project management is all about to a subtle shifting engagement with the complexities of identity and practice.

This dialogical work is part of the transformational work of the project manager. In addition, there is also a cluster of talents associated with the relational world. These relational talents include: understanding that we are engaging with the world from a position; breaking down the problem solving duality (us and them / it); and the willingness to develop as mindful practitioners embracing the head:hand:heart perspective on project management.

The appreciation that they were co-creating knowledge from a specific position is shared in key moments in the dissertations and interviews. Lewis (Section 8.4.2.2) shares an awareness of his cultural sensitivity influenced by his understanding of a situation whilst for Javier this came from his strategic thinking that enabled him to see the different expectations of the project (Section 8.4.2.2). Marguz's power came from his position and his use of a specific approach (Section 8.6.1) and it would be intriguing to consider how he would have felt in the position of the contractors. Would he have felt his techniques offered clarity of purpose or intrusive disciplining? Being able to take a different perspective and see the world through the experiences of the other parties is a key aspect of these ways of being.

Ohannes demonstrates this ability. He is able to move away from his previous position as an expert and to practise project management from a systemic perspective. His curiosity and affiliation with the client's system demonstrated a new way of working (Section 8.6.5). In a similar way Martin also changed the way problem situations were seen in his organisation, by engaging in meaningful dialogue with his suppliers and his staff (Section 8.6.5) whilst Javier and Anna spoke of the way that their self-schema had created or amplified challenges in their projects (Section 8.4.2.5).

A third element of this relational world are the connections we make with ourselves. The dissertations and the interviews have demonstrated the breadth of learning opportunities that practising project management offers the professional. At their most engaged the learning has considered issues of identity, temperament and personality. In this research project I have witnessed Margaret's creation of a sense of professional identity through the use of the toolkit (Section 8.6.1), Tina's rejection of reflective practice (Section 6.1), Martin's tsunami moment and his resultant retreat into the "caveman child" (Section 8.6.4) and Catherine's awareness that she can give away some of her power and does not need to be the "be-all [and end all]" (Section 8.6.2). These insights into the soul of professional practice create a space for the individual to become a more mindful practitioner. By embracing a deeper understanding of their practice and recognising their choices in what they pay attention to, how they approach their practice and how they co-construct their practice with the other stakeholders, the mindful practitioner is able to embrace a transformational way of being.

This notion of transformational practice is represented by the metaphors of the champion and the ambassador. In the kaleidoscope of practice (Sections 8.6.4 and 8.6.5) these two roles represented the manner in which the project manager

is attuned to a greater good that may arise from the project, and becomes the embodiment of the project. By representing the project manager as a champion I want to focus on the sense-creating role that they have. Projects, as such, do not exist, they are created through social interaction. Acting as a champion, the project manager is able to weave from the competing narratives of the problem situation, the requirements and the constraints towards a compelling narrative of social change and development. They may be guided by ethical perspectives to ensure that the investment made is attuned to a greater social good, is sustainable and is the 'right' shape. Aligned to this role of champion the project manager is also the ambassador of the project. They are seen as the embodiment of the project and it is through this role that they influence the specific culture of the project. They guide the way that things are done within the project that is the level of engagement, the style of decision making, and the recognition of the team, all of which are informed by the role of the ambassador.

9.5 Systemic Eloquence: Ways of Knowing, Doing and Being

The three zones have been offered in isolation and may appear to be a hierarchy with the outer zone being more important than the other two zones. An alternative representation is to see the three zones working in harmony with each other. Through this understanding I can see a picture of systemic eloquence (Oliver 1996) arising from the research findings. Oliver asserts that the ability to take on different positions and to honour different perspectives provides insight into different patterns that will enhance our ability to transform ourselves and our communities. This representation of the three zones working in harmony rather than being a hierarchy is presented in Figure 56 below.

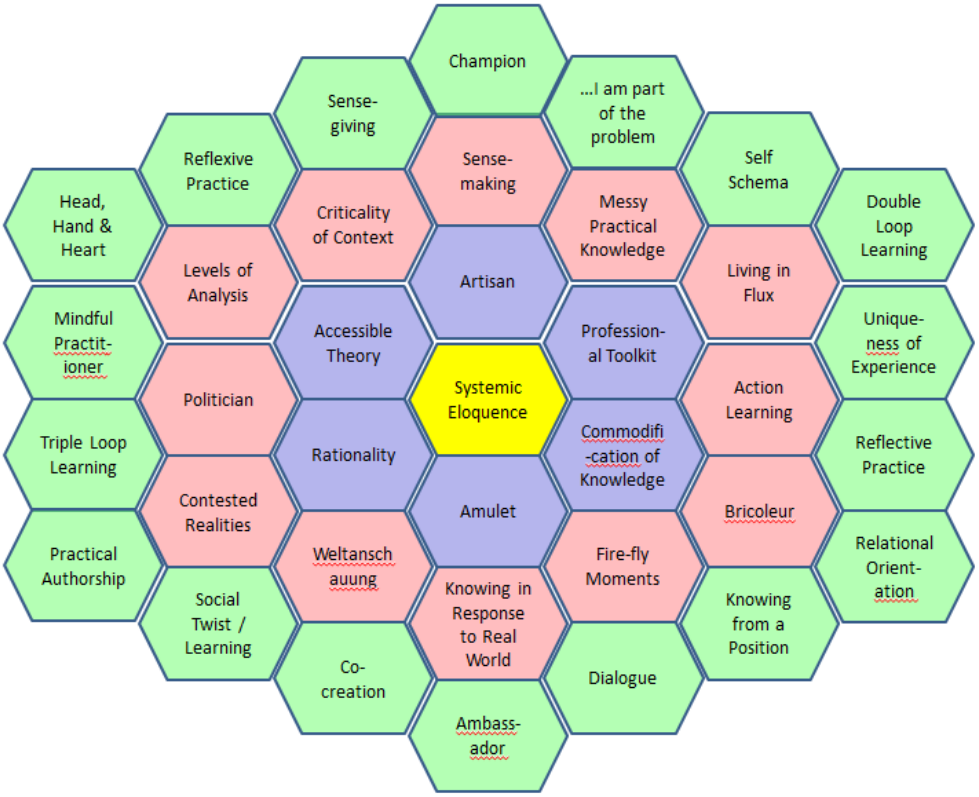


Figure 56: Systemic Eloquence; Ways of Knowing, Doing and Being

Source: author

In the next section, this topography of systemic eloquence will be used to draw the research to a close and present a summary of my understanding. To support this summary, specific elements of the topography are backlit to draw attention to the main findings in each of the two research questions.

9.6 The Critical Moments of Practice

The externally focussed research question looked at the actuality of project management practice and sought to identify the critical elements in their practice. By reviewing the findings of the analysis of the world clouds, the critical incident analysis and the interviews, a pattern of practice emerged. The recurrent themes of this pattern were overlaid onto the topography of practice (see Figure 57, overleaf).

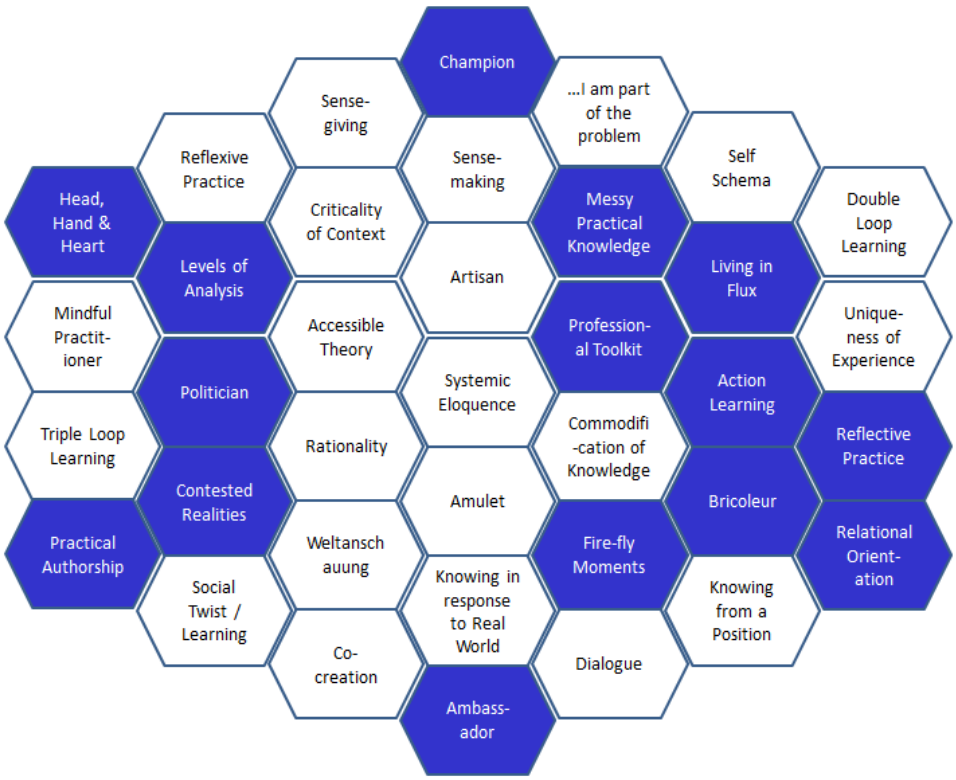


Figure 57: Critical Moments of Practice

Source: author

This pattern indicates that the actuality of project management practice lies in the socially constructed world. As practitioners, project managers are striving to

create something new through the engagement with a diverse range of stakeholders. The challenges that they are facing are aligned to the different viewpoints and opinions that the community has about their endeavours and whether they want to align themselves to this initiative or place themselves in positions of conflict, ambiguity or apathy. As the practitioners seek to create a sustainable transformation they are relying on their ability to weave these disparate inputs into a rich tapestry. The ability to work in these messy situations and to create value for their organisations in such challenging circumstances is critical to their perception of success.

Realising that the significant moments of practice are aligned to the systemic world has significant implications for my practice. Working within the context of the MSc in Project Management it has encouraged me to align the programme to this perspective. The focus of the course is now on using the tools and techniques of project management as a springboard into the systemic world of practice. This is witnessed in the introduction of new modules that look at stakeholder engagement, consultancy practice and appreciative approaches to change management. The content of these new modules is aimed at helping practitioners see that the world of project management practice is full of meaning and that one of their roles is to enter this world through dialogue. In doing so they co-create communities of meaning, where the differing stakeholder groups can perceive the benefit of the transformation and align themselves to this project.

Understanding this new course as a synthesis of the systematic and systemic worlds of project management practice creates a number of challenges to my practice. The resulting internally orientated question explored the legitimacy of my practice in delivering project management education.

9.7 Appropriate Educational Practices for the Development of Project Management Professionals

The internally focussed research question examined my living theory and how the practices of systems thinking, action learning, reflective practice and systemic practice can be drawn upon to create rich learning environments for project managers.

In the previous section I illustrated the range of findings from this thesis through a topography of practice. Initially this topography was constructed just to present the key findings of the thesis. However the version presented in the thesis offers insights into the developmental journey from systematic to systemic practitioner. This framework has been presented to a number of colleagues in a variety of organisational development roles (see Appendix 7 for an account of how one has used this to understand their own journey) and they have supported its efficacy in illuminating a significant challenge to educationalists. Consequently, in the next section I will explain this topography through an account of my journey to a becoming a systemic practitioner and then deploy it to describe atypical journeys of the students enrolled on the MSc in Project Management.

9.7.1 My Journey to Systemic Practice

The typography of practice can be used to illuminate the key stages in a professional's developmental journey. The idea of this representation is to foreground the significant aspects of a developmental journey, rather than touch upon all of the influences. By focussing on 7-10 key moments of

development my aim is to further understand what is important and to focus my energy on these topics. This process is illustrated with my personal journey in Figure 58, below.

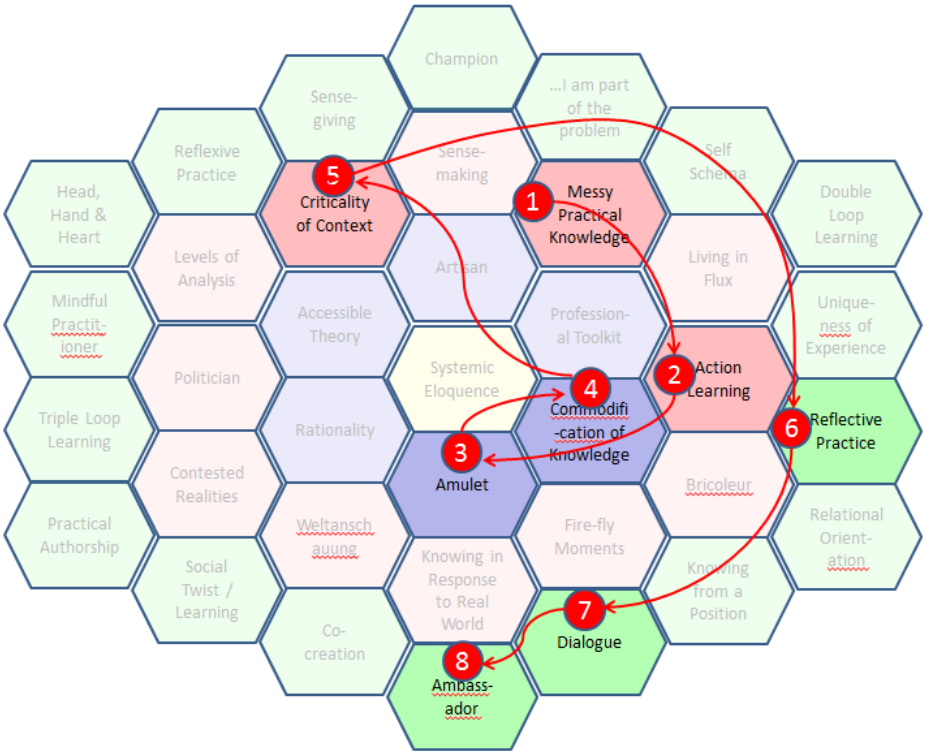


Figure 58: Mapping the Key Stages of my Learning Journey

Source: author

My journey to becoming a systemic practitioner saw me enter the academic profession on the basis of my experience in a different context than that of a project management practitioner. This entry point is shown in Figure 58 as point ❶. In this early stage of my academic career I facilitated action learning sets that focussed on providing an educational space where others could make sense of their practical dilemmas ❷. However, when I was deployed to teach on the full-time, pre-

practice/experience courses I entrenched myself in a more systematic inquiry into project management. Focussing on the 'essential' tools of project management I sought to assure myself, the school and the students of the legitimacy of my practice by delivering a content rich approach to project management. I believed I could protect myself and my status by teaching by the book and delivering a generic toolkit that could be deployed in multiple contexts. This was my amulet as seen in the hexagons ❸ and ❹.

It was only by recognising and responding to the 'tipping point' that I was able to move beyond this practice. By appreciating the criticality of context ❺ I was able to break the stare of the *Dementors* and to start my own living inquiry into my practice as a teacher. Crucial to my development has been my ability to reflect on my practice both within my familiar context at Lancaster University and also a deliberately chosen unfamiliar context of Beijing University of Foreign Studies, China❻.

The key insight that my reflections offered illuminated my orientation and the benefit of developing this form of practice from a systematic to a systemic perspective. I perceive the key difference in my approach to be the nature of the dialogical interactions I endeavour to have. I aim to approach all my engagements with my colleagues and students from a starting point of a dialogical stance and to use this to co-create a response that energises and motivates us all ❼. I appreciate that this position is different to how other professionals teach project management or engage with their students and, within the Management School, I am perceived as an Ambassador for this approach ❽.

Having illustrated the use of the topography of practice to map my professional journey I will show how this model can be used to understand the journeys of two types of students that enrol on the MSc in Project Management.

9.7.2 An Educational Journey for a Post Experience Professional

The MSc in Project Management offers a pathway for experienced project professionals to step away from their practice and engage in an academic course that provides an opportunity to do some sense making of their experiences, to validate their understanding of project management and to engage in a broader appreciation of the practice of project management. This pathway is represented in Figure 59, overleaf.

The starting point of their journey is entry into an accidental professional role where they are placed into project management positions without a formal background in professional practice ❶. Their success in an accidental career is grounded on their "theories in use" rather than any systematic application of the "espoused theories" of project management (Argyris, 1980)❷. On a quest to validate their experience and obtain a more systematic grounding in the profession, they enrol on the course. Their espoused goal is to use the qualification as an artefact that will open up new career opportunities ❸❹❺.

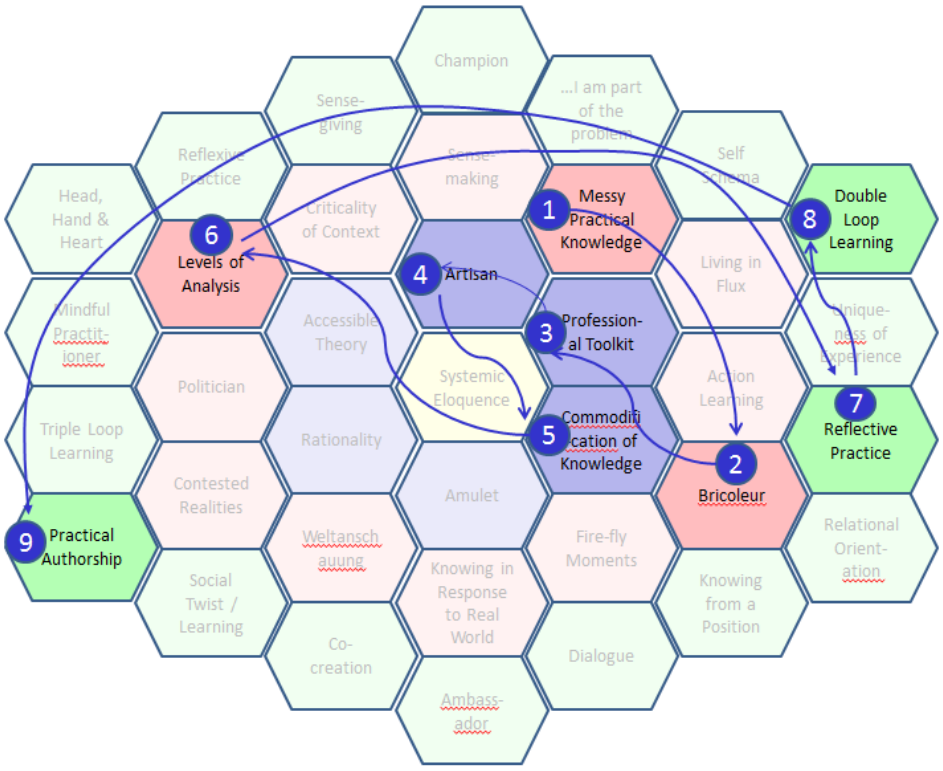


Figure 59: Mapping the Key Stages of the Learning Journey for a Post Experience Student

Source: author

However, whilst they frequently enrol with this rational objective in mind the course provides them with a context and an opportunity to develop their professional practice in ways that they may not have anticipated. The analytical content of the course, working alongside the course's pedagogy creates an opportunity to undertake an analysis of the experiences that they brought with them, as well as those experienced on the course itself ❻. By making the connections with their professional histories they are able to see nuances of their practice, expose some of their 'how to' that had remained hidden, as well as develop possible new approaches to practice ❼❽. This journey from a professional seeking to validate their experience to one who can see these experiences in a totally different

manner enables the experienced professional to rewrite their professional history❾, taking account of different positions, worldviews and interpretations of events in a way that assists them to understand some of the challenges that led them to enrol on the course in the first place.

This journey of an experienced professional coming to appreciate the value of their experiences, as well as developing a systematic approach to engaging with new experiences, provides a rich synthesis of the systemic and systematic approaches to professional development. However, it is possible that this journey is influenced by who they are and how their identity has been created through their initial round of professional practice. This grounding in professional practice is something that the majority of the students do not have as they enter the course directly from an undergraduate degree.

9.7.3 An Educational Journey for a Pre Experience Professional

In contrast to the emancipatory journey of an experienced professional (Section 8.7.2) I see the journey of a young graduate entering the MSc in Project Management to be more akin to a gradual awakening of possibilities (see Figure 60, below).

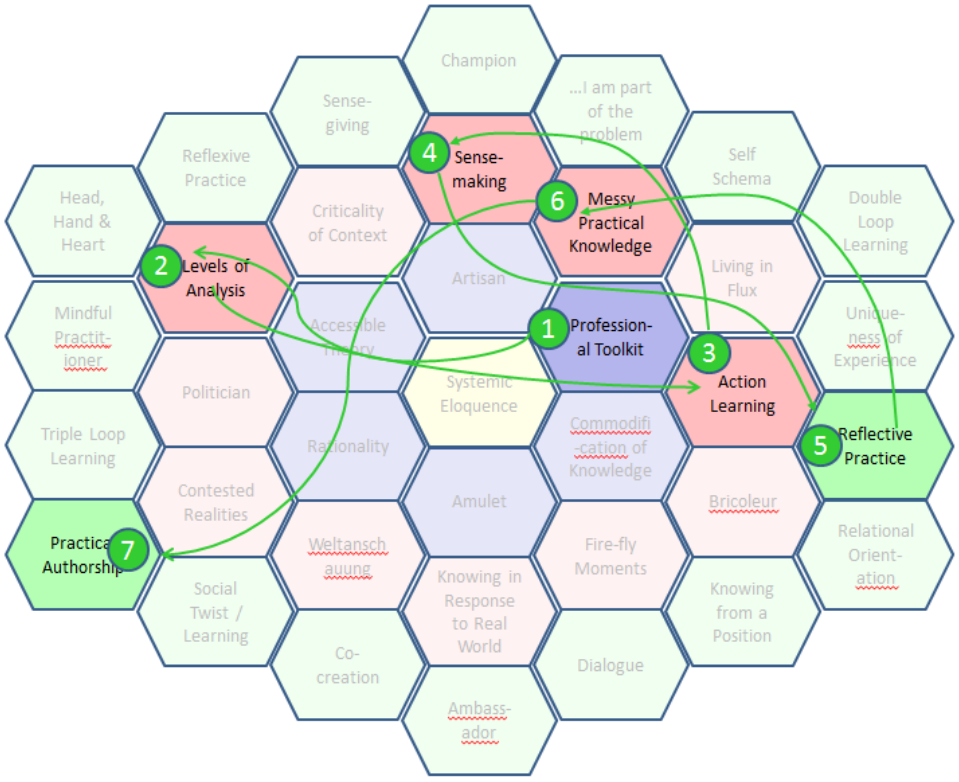


Figure 60: Mapping the Key Stages of a Young Graduate's Learning Journey

Source: author

Their journey has a key purpose; namely to attain the systematic toolkit that will allow them to gain entry into an organisation as a project manager ❶. This journey moves from the desire to engage with a toolkit to one where they are required to critique the practice of project management by using different theoretical lenses. These different lenses challenge some of the key assumptions of project management through an academic analysis of core knowledge, however it also develops their awareness as practitioners ❷. As the course progresses the frame of their analysis moves increasingly from a detached conceptual analysis to a more personal one as the students engage in action learning projects. In exploring the word clouds and dissertation critical incidents, it appears that this engagement in the action learning projects is initially one of sense-making where the students are faced with the messy challenges of project life and attempt to harness the dynamics of the project through a deployment of the tools and techniques. This balance of action learning and personal growth through reflective practice ❹❺❻ becomes the essence of the course during the summer dissertation phase.

This journey from a desire to know the fundamental techniques to living within the complexity of the action learning projects is also a journey of them entering the project management profession. An element to this continued desire to identify themselves as project managers is explored in their personal narratives. They become the storytellers of their practice in multiple arenas: in the academic assignments; in their job interviews; in their peer-to-peer conversations and in their accounts of their year away from their families. As such the journey that they emerge from is one of practical authorship and becoming a project manager, while coincidentally becoming a more independent adult, rather than just a process of studying project management.

9.7.4 Informing My Practice

The nuances of these journeys offer insights into the relevance of my living theory but draw my attention to some potential challenges to the validity of my practice. To assist in this account I have overlaid the two journeys in Figure 61, overleaf.

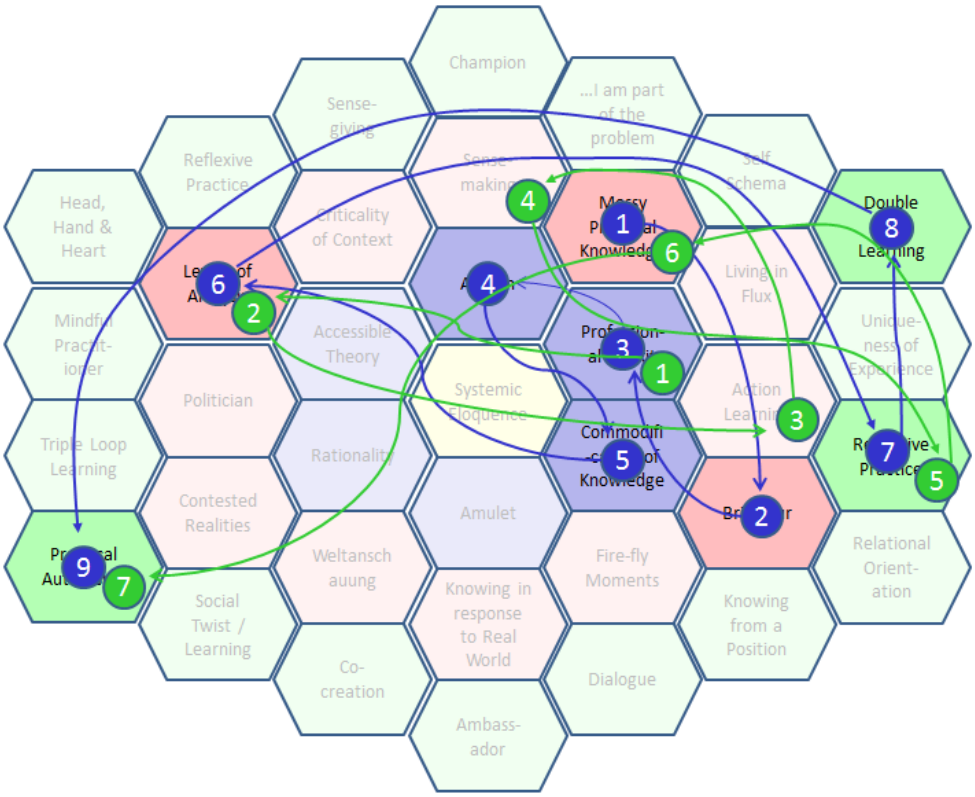


Figure 61: Comparison of the Journeys of the Pre and Post Experience Students

Source: author

A significant difference between the students who enrol on the course after a period of professional employment and those who enrol straight from university is an awareness of a context for project management practice. This affords them an arena in which to assess the relevance of the course content as well as being an invitation to explore why they do what they do. These affordances offer them insights into the contextual relevance of new ways of practising project management.

In contrast to this perspective it is possible to see how the students entering the course fresh from undergraduate study are able to use their skills in academic analysis to develop a more penetrating analysis of the fundamental concepts and theories of practice. The skills that allowed them to enter their postgraduate course, that is excellence in their undergraduate courses, assists them in an aspect of their engagement in the MSc in Project Management. However, by playing to these strengths they are, perhaps, constraining themselves by focussing on the systematic theories of project management rather than considering more systemic challenges, including most importantly how to get the theory to work for themselves.

To balance these two communities in a single course is challenging. On the one hand, we have a community of *bricoleurs* that we want to lead into deeper theoretical insights on their practice. On the other hand, we have a community of skilled academics who we want to lead towards a consideration of personal mastery. Having this blend offers significant advantages when a community of practitioners is co-created during the year we are working together. However, it is clear that such a community

cannot be created through a programme that places the greatest emphasis on abstract theoretical content. To assist in the development of this community it is important to bring their attention to the significance of shared experiences. By placing a shared experience at the core of their practice we are then able to assist in unveiling this experience, which opens up different appreciations and understandings of the dilemmas of practice. This is the core ethos behind embedding action learning in the programme.

Whilst action learning is a powerful pedagogical approach there is an important imperative that I need to embrace. This is the balance of being thoughtful as well as purposeful. It is through striving to attain this balance that a deeper level of understanding can be nurtured. This is partly addressed through the focussing of the specific individual assignments on a broader systemic question of What does the experience mean to me?, and partly through the engagement with reflective practice. By infusing these themes into the everyday discourse of the programme I am seeking to make a clear statement of commitment. I am passionate about their ability to translate experience and theoretical insights into more thoughtful and more purposeful professional practice.

To assist this journey I believe that a socially orientated approach to reflective practice offers significant possibilities. Using a blend of set group process, learning presentations and coaching conversations to open up a "zone of reflexive capacity" (Tinsley & Lebak 2009) that creates awareness of assumptions, self-schema and provides insight into some of the possibilities of future practice. In this way the practical know-how of the post experience students can support the learning opportunities of the less experienced students.

In considering my living theory I can see how the integration of a systematic approach to SSM, action learning and reflective practice provides a structured engagement into the socially constructed nature of projects. It provides a translation of project action/activity into potentially significant learning experiences that will assist in the development of a new generation of project managers. However, the consideration of the topography of professional practice offers a significant word of caution. The foundations of practice need to be established to assist the practitioners to become *bricoleurs*.

By considering the importance of the systematic approach to project management I am pulling back my desire to just play the role of *accoucher* (Revans 1998, p.110). As well as creating a fertile field for the development of practice I also need to lay down the seed that can flourish into systematic professional practice. In the fullness of time these foundations may be developed as the artisan becomes the *bricoleur* but it is important to remember that this step cannot easily be avoided. If the seeds are not laid down and nurtured then the practice is intuitive or appetitive rather than being based on a solid foundation of understanding.

The systemic eloquence to practice is gained through a combination of this systematic approach to practice development coupled with a systemic disposition. By nurturing an approach to practice that is comfortable with difference, is curious about the uniqueness of practice and is committed to engaging in dialogical processes to understand the community, a transition to a way of being is co-created. This new way of being is one that can embrace the students, their stakeholders and their engaged *accouchers*.

A final consideration in the appropriateness of my living theory is that of the 'real world' nature of my practice. Accepting that project managers are more likely to learn to be project managers by doing project management, I seek to embed practicums within the MSc in Project Management. These practicums need to be as real as possible. Having case studies presented as action learning projects is perhaps better than no case studies at all but if there is limited opportunity for the engagement in, and development of, the social aspects of project management then these case studies are only doing half the job. They are assisting the students to apply a toolkit to a constrained problem situation without creating a context for the development of the wider array of attributes that project management requires in a messy problem situation. If I want to assist in the development of 'real world' project managers then I need embrace the nuances and complexities of real world practicums.

9.8 Wrapping Up

In this chapter I have presented a discussion of the findings of this thesis in a way that reveals the topography of project management practice and aligns this to the considered way I engage in my practice. This has illustrated three dimensions to project management practice that are called the 'ways of knowing', the 'ways of doing' and the 'ways of being'. The combination of these three zones is called systemic eloquence and refers to the nuanced approach to systemic project management practice.

Taking this topography as a way of exploring my living theory I have considered the potential routes of this practice for a post experience and a pre experience student. These hypothetical journeys have illuminated some of the tensions in my practice such as the ability to deliver a synchronous course to asynchronous participants, and considered how an approach based upon the systematic deployments of SSM, action learning and reflective practice overcomes some of the challenges providing a rich educational context.

Infusing this systematic approach with a systemic orientation to practice creates significant opportunities for the students to develop a dialogical way of being that prompts them to connect with their communities and co-create the projects of the future.

This is my practice.

9.8.1 Summary of the Key Findings:

In this section I will briefly outline the key findings of the thesis. A number of these findings are explicitly covered above but some of these need to be drawn out and deserve to be explicitly stated here in their own right.

9.8.1.1 Project Management is More Than a Technique

Whilst the language of project management is frequently centred on a technical domain and is infused with rational instruments of control (i.e. managerial plans) the practice of project management goes far beyond this. In analysing the accounts of practice this research project has identified that these rational instruments may form a foundation for the practitioner but are seldom enough to deliver a successful project.

The focus of the research came to rest on a wider social and systemic nature of project management. The practices that appear more critical to the students and alumni lie in the arenas of communication, stakeholder engagement, group and team working.

9.8.1.2 Projects are Socially Constructed

Developing the previous point it is apparent that projects do not exist outside a social context. Whilst a project may be initiated by a client or sponsor it is created through the dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders. In this sense projects are socially constructed entities that are brought to fruition through social interaction. Consequently,

a consideration of project management as practical authorship where the contested realities of practice are given shared meaning through systemic practices would offer new insights to the practitioner and the profession.

This finding leads to two key aspects for a systemic view of project management. The first is the hypothesis that if projects are negotiated with a wide range of stakeholders it is probable that different project managers looking at the same problem situation would construct a different understanding of what is required and how it could be delivered. This difference would be down to a range of factors including their ability to analyse the situation, engage with stakeholders, develop a common vision of the project and lead the team to delivery. The second important point is that if projects are socially constructed then providing early career professionals with the knowledge, practice and experience to develop a systemic perspective is a crucial aspect of their development.

9.8.1.3 Project Management is a Highly Individualised Practice

In exploring the accounts of practice it is apparent that project management is a bespoke and highly individualised form of practice. The project managers fire-fly practice was not undertaken according to a given formulae or adherence to a notion of best practice. Instead their work was highly contextual and individual in nature, that is, it had the stamp of their personalities engrained within it. Consequently, the stories that emerged are about how practising project managers survive in the flux rather than how they apply a standard toolkit.

9.8.1.4 Project Management is a Career Beyond Rationality

The commodification of project management places a boundary around effective practice proclaiming that it is possible to deliver successful projects through the deployment of a rational toolkit. The experience of the practising projects managers is not one of a bounded rationality but of surviving beyond the boundaries of rationality.

The fire-fly moments that this research project uncovered are infused with emotions as the project managers try to work alongside the "menace to society" (Jacinata's term for the accountant in her team), their own "caveman child" (Section 7.6.3) or Machiavellian team members (Section 7.4.3.2). This research suggests that in order to thrive in a career in project management the practitioner needs to display a significant amount of emotional intelligence as well as technical skills.

9.8.1.5 Project Management Education Needs to Reflect the Practice

The actuality of project management practice presented in this thesis illustrates a more nuanced profession than the one represented by many academic treatments. To create a course or core text that adequately covers these nuances would be a never-ending quest that raises the question about how to prepare people for this profession.

Central to any development in project management education is the distinction between preparing people to enter the profession in contrast to preparing people to talk about the profession. If universities are seeking to develop practising project managers then action learning based pedagogy offers many advantages for the development of the whole professional. By combining a range of practicums with supervision from experienced project managers a breadth and depth of the subject may be explored.

The balancing of an action learning pedagogy alongside a reflective practice process provides a sophisticated approach that can offer insight into the realities of practice and the possibilities open for personal growth. Having these two processes operating in tandem creates a privileged space for considering the implications of practice at an ethical level.

9.8.1.6 An Accidental Professional is Not the Same as a *Bricoleur*

This thesis has revealed the art of intuitive professional practice by calling this person a *bricoleur*. This mastery in the art of the nudge, doing just enough of the right thing at the right moment (Barge, 2007) is learnt through experience but is grounded in conscious professional development in the same way that a jazz musician will study scales in order to allow them to improvise freely.

Having this subtlety of repertoire is not the same as blindly trusting the process. A systematic level of knowledge as shown in the typology is a stage that practitioners need to immerse themselves in

in order to become more capable practitioners later on. It is only by having formal knowledge that the avenues of improvisation are made available.

9.8.1.7 Critical Incidents are Not Necessarily Critical nor Incidents

Over time explicit processes are absorbed by the professional and may be passed down to future generations via example or word of mouth. This consumption and reproduction of practice has the potential for including nuances of practice appropriate to the context. However, it also has the potential to distort the original practice.

An example of how an informal consumption of practice can lead to unintended consequences is seen in the concept of the Critical incident. Flanagan's (1954) original intention was that a critical incident was something of significance to the practitioner's on-going journey of development. However, it has been communicated to generations of students as being an isolated event with amazing or shocking properties.

As well as having relevance for this specific point there is also a general theme behind this finding. That practitioners need to remain conscious about their practice and be aware of slipping into an 'unconscious competence' mode. Instead we should strive for a mindful practice that is grounded in the nuances of context.

9.8.1.8 Systemic Eloquence: Learning to Balance the Systematic with the Systemic

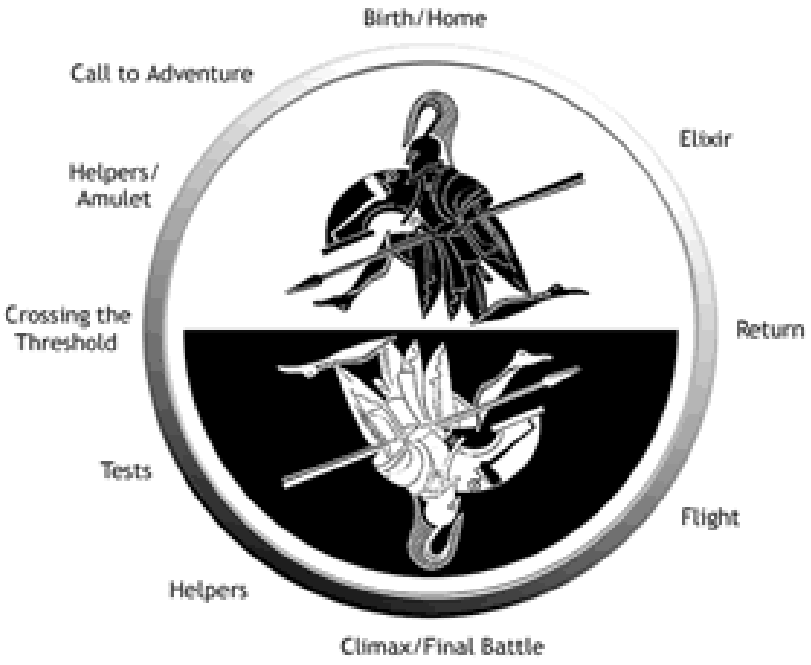
The topography of professional practice illustrates the balance that successful practitioners need to attain. Their practice needs to contain elements of systematic and systemic practice as shown in the ways of knowing, doing and being.

The ability to call upon this range of abilities is systemic eloquence and is a highly individualised practice that reflects the context of practice as well as reflecting the talents of the project manager.

However, whilst successful practice is deemed to encompass the systemic as well as the systematic domains of knowing, doing and being, the formal development of practitioners is still dominated by their need to demonstrate the attainment of systematic knowledge. This reliance on developing future practitioners through a pedagogy that primarily focuses on their ability to talk about systematic practice rather than their ability to do project management is still common in universities and professional bodies. Having such a constraint does not serve the long-term interests of the individuals and the communities that they seek to serve.

CHAPTER 10:

"RETURN": A REFLECTION ON THE LEARNING JOURNEY AND THE "DREAM TALK" FOR THE FUTURE



10. "RETURN": A REFLECTION ON THE LEARNING JOURNEY AND THE "DREAM TALK" FOR THE FUTURE

10.1 Introduction

This chapter presents my reflections on the research journey that I have undertaken as an insider-researcher and provides a launch-pad for my "dream talk" (McAdam & Lang, 2009) for disseminating this research with a wider community of practitioners.

A context for this chapter is provided in Figure 62, overleaf that illustrates the key elements of the study and depicts their inter-relationships. This rich picture shows how the different strands of the externally orientated research project (i.e. word clouds, critical incidents and alumni interviews) connect to a social system. This social system is particularly focussed on the relationships between students and the academic staff, the programme director (and wider university) and the '*established'* knowledge on the domain (e.g. the Body of Knowledge). This social system is immersed in a context that includes the change of departmental ownership and the realignment of the programme to an 'in practice' ethos in Oct. 2012.

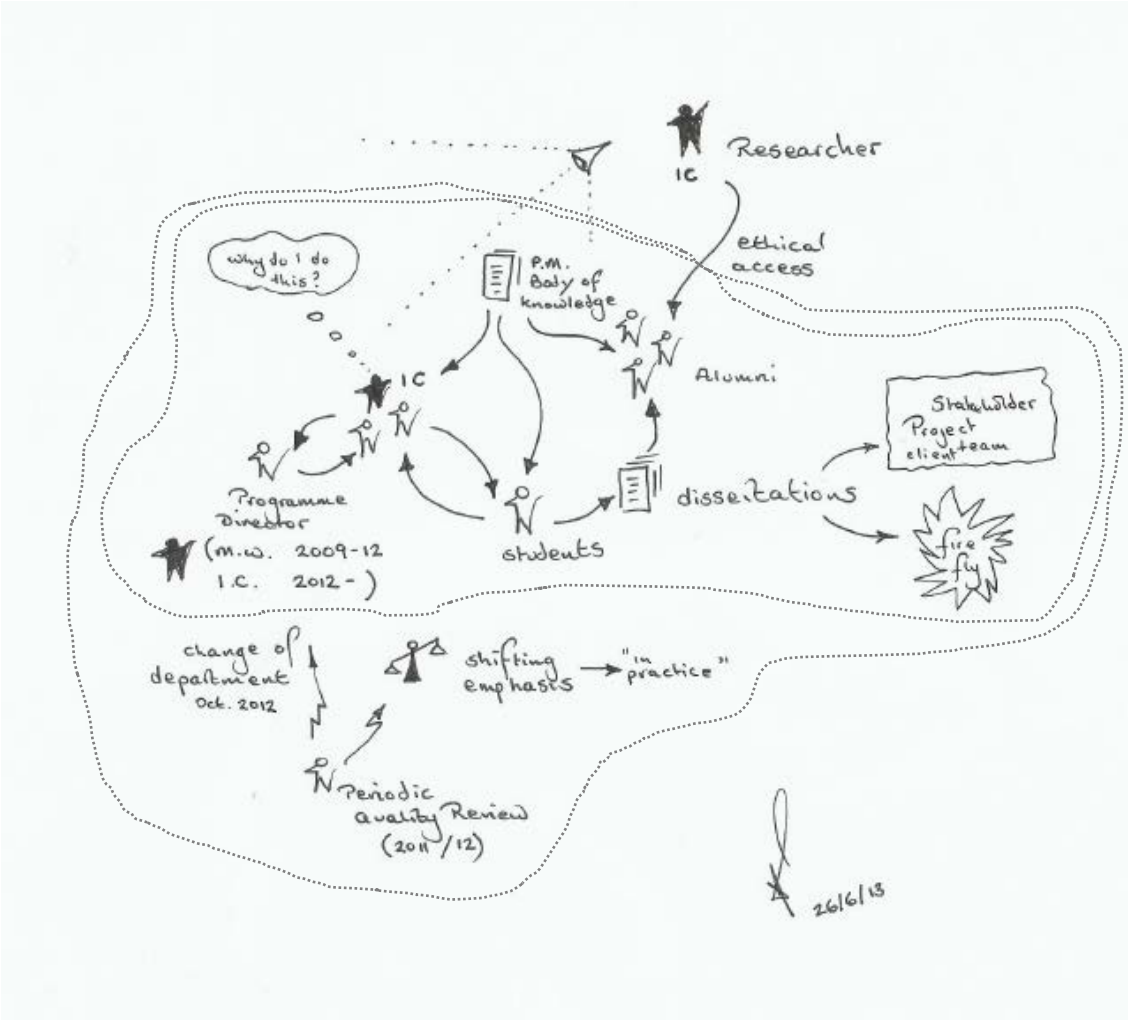


Figure 62: The Researcher's Position

Source: author

Figure 62 also shows the researcher's positions in this project. However, whilst many research approaches would advocate looking at this situation from an external position that would offer highly objective rational insights into future practice I am looking around the system from a number of perspectives. Having these multiple positions as an insider-researcher involves me in a symbiotic relationship with the subject of my research. Costley et al (2010) assert that the insider-research has a unique position that allows them to develop significant insight in a highly contextualised project. These insights are drawn, in part, from

my rich appreciation of the course (its origins, history and idiosyncrasies), the research participants and my values, motivations and aspirations in my teaching practice. An alternative perspective on this connectedness is that the researcher may be *too* closely connected to be able to see the wood for the trees, lack impartiality or be faced with ethical dilemmas in their quest to create new knowledge (Costley et al, 2010).

10.2 Insider-Researcher Dilemmas

In this research project I have found three key dilemmas that have emerged and which offer me cause to reflect and consider the efficacy and effectiveness of my (research) practice. These dilemmas are: the overlapping roles that I have in the project; the messiness of the problem situation coupled with my desire to convey this as an orderly thesis and the ability to translate my findings into a sustainable course of action.

An awareness of the overlapping roles in my practice is shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2 (Pages 3 and 4 respectively). These illustrate the manner in which my practice is grounded in a multiplicity of worldviews. The competing needs of the university, the administration teams, the faculty and the students are illustrated in Figure 1 whilst Figure 2 focusses on my engagement with the students and the manner in which I am a content provider, and assessor, a model of practice, a facilitator of practice and a mentor for future practice. Overlaid onto this multiplicity is the role of the insider-researcher.

As a researcher I was aware of alternative approaches (e.g. longitudinal approach with reflective journals, interviews, participant observation etc.) and different

research populations (e.g. current students, alumni etc.). I chose a thematic analysis of already completed dissertations along with interviews of the alumni as a way of gaining insight into the experience of the students without distorting the student:supervisor relationship. However, whilst this was ethically desirable it did not detach me from the complexities of being an insider-researcher. At various stages in this project I was aware of how the insights from my living theory as well as the 'external' research were able to inform my practice in the 'here and now'. I found that my engagements with students or colleagues were frequently wrapped up in insights from multiple researcher/ practitioner perspectives. It did not seem to matter if the activity was preparing or delivering a teaching session, conducting a tutorial or assessing a piece of work my mind was working in different contexts. In the practical world I was not able to detach the researcher and in the research world I was not able to silence the voice of the practitioner.

This duality frequently played out as a critique of my practice. It became a significant challenge to, for example, mark a piece of work without an inner-narrative critiquing what this said of my capacity to co-create environments that support the students' development. This awareness had a number of benefits in that it enhanced my mindfulness and continually tested my practice (and the research findings) but it also became personally challenging in that during the working week it was difficult to put the research to one side and when doing my research at the weekend it became difficult to put the work to one side.

Considering this from the position of the other stakeholders in the research project I believe I have sought to minimise the impact on the students (e.g. by choosing to interview alumni rather than current students). However, a conversation I had a number of years ago illustrates how this research could be perceived. In a social discussion with a number of students about the course and

its evolution I spoke of it has developed and my aspirations to make it more systemic. Showing a curiosity about the initiative I was also asked if this would devalue their qualification. Exploring this further I became aware that the students felt they had placed considerable effort into a programme that they perceived was now of less value because the next cohort would have a 'better' experience. Whist I explained about the natural evolution of courses and the efficacy of placing reflective practice at the heart of my practice, when we left the conversation I felt that they were still uncomfortable with this development.

I am also conscious of the effect it has had on my colleagues. There is a view that this research project is challenging to their practice as well as my own. It is bringing to the surface questions and debates about the effectiveness of our intervention in the student's journey, the efficaciousness of the course to meet educational outcomes and the efficiency of our approach. Whilst a dialogical approach to my practice is significant to me I am aware that my passion may not necessarily be theirs and my ideas and actions may not support their professional journeys.

These dilemmas about the multiple roles have been exacerbated in the final eighteen months when I was presented with an opportunity to become director of the programme and to realign it to a practice based MSc. This redesign was an affordance to create a course that combines the systemic with the systematic. Whilst I believe the MSc in Project Management programme is more balanced with these changes it also highlights the challenges of juggling multiple positions as an insider-researcher.

10.3 The Messiness of Insider-Research

The culmination of this doctoral research project is the production and defence of a thesis. Whilst these artefacts represent the research journey that I have been immersed in for five years they are not the whole story. The "map is not the territory" (Bateson, 1979) and choices have been made that place aspects in the limelight of the thesis whilst relegating other elements to the shadows. This use of the metaphor of the Hero's Journey (Campbell, 1988) as a device to communicate the story has also represented a smoother journey than the ebb and flow of actual research practice. In this section I will step back from this harmonious representation to consider some of the dilemmas I have faced along the way.

The first dilemma was the non-linear nature of the research project. An insight into the type of project I have been immersed in is provided by Obeng (1994) who identifies four types of projects by considering the clarity of 'what to do' and 'how to do it' (see Figure 63, overleaf). In the extremes he places a style of project where both of these dimensions are either understood ("Painting by Numbers") or ambiguous ("Lost in the Fog"). This description of project types is relevant to research projects. If I had been seeking to understand the efficaciousness of Earned Value through the longitudinal analysis of a series of major construction projects it could be claimed to be a "painting by numbers" project as I would have known what I wanted to achieve and how I was going to do this. However, this certainty was not apparent at the outset of this research project. As I entered into this research project I was clear about my objective (to develop my practice as an educator in project management) but I was open to a range of methods. I was embarking upon a "Quest".

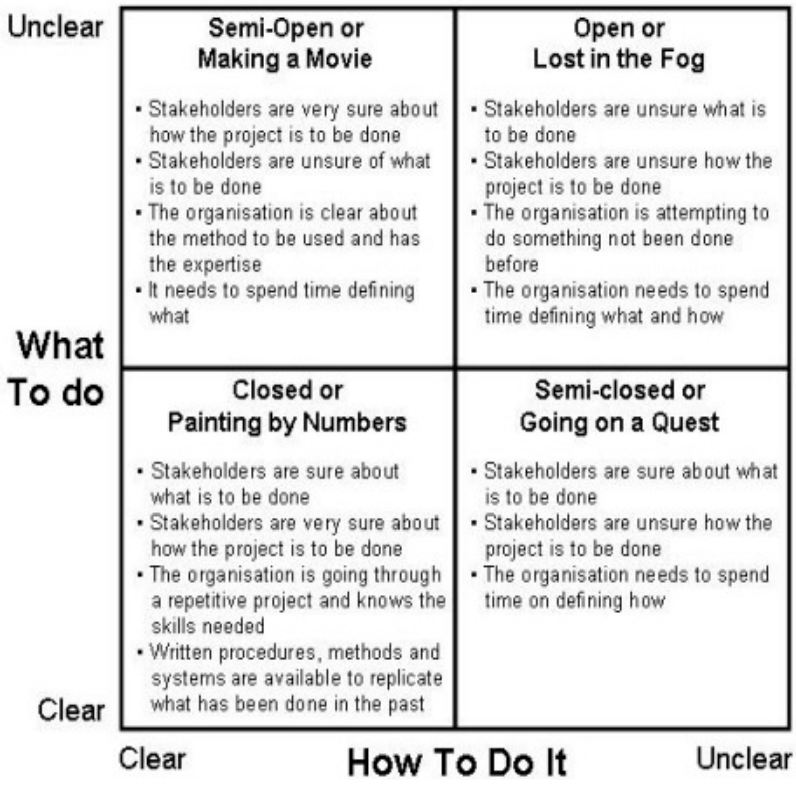


Figure 63: Obeng's Typology of Projects

Source: Obeng (1994)

My approach to the Quest type project (Obeng, 1994) was to adopt a process of concurrency in the execution of this research project. This process of has its roots in the foundation of project management (Lenflet & Loch, 2010) and provides opportunities for the insider-researcher to follow the hottest trail rather than the predicted path to completion. By having different methods deployed in the quest for new knowledge I was flying a number of kites in the belief that some of these would soar and give me significant insight. As with all concurrent projects I was accepting that the desire to have the richest possible

insight was taking priority over the desire to complete the most efficient research project.

The kites that I have flown but that were omitted from the final thesis include my auto-ethnography of a teaching practice through a series of vignettes (August – December 2009), the development of a portfolio of professional practice (September 2009 – June 2010), development of a reflective toolkit (see Appendix 6, March – September 2011). Some of these have morphed over the years into aspects of the final thesis (e.g. the vignettes were the starting point for the cartoons), positioned as supporting evidence (e.g. the toolkit) or omitted from the thesis (e.g. the portfolio). The decision to select the elements that have been presented (i.e. the living theory, word clouds, critical incidents and interviews) was both pragmatic and based on the desire to balance the internal and external dimensions of the thesis and the quality of the insights I was drawing from this work.

The Gantt chart overleaf (Figure 64) shows the timescales where each of the threads emerged and was captured in the thesis. The items colour coded in red are the key elements that were not developed in this thesis and the items in orange have been modified from their original purpose.

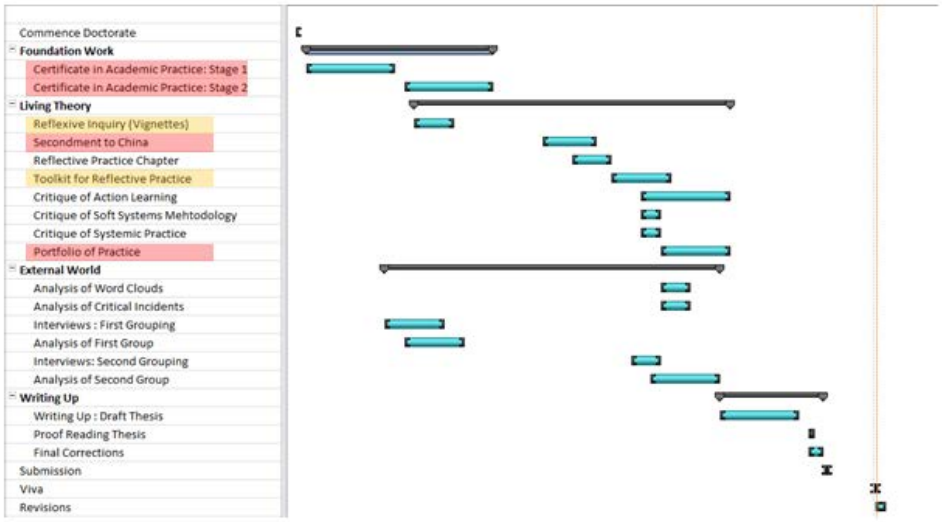


Figure 64: Gantt chart of the Research Project

Source: author

The concurrent research strategy was a key element of the messiness of this research. Another important aspect is the manner in which an insider-researcher's journey is a single strand in a more complex journey that the organisation is taking. In the richness of my daily life I see the challenges of the Dementors lurking behind many of the challenges that the organisation is facing. Sometimes these surface from the response I witness in class at other times in the response of my peers or supervisors to the pedagogy that I seek to use. This is illustrated in the manner in which the redesign of the course to a practice based MSc is seen as an efficiency driven initiative by some members of the university rather than being a choice that we are making to enhance the learning experience of the students and that their journey to practitioners needs to be supported.

In a similar fashion I can witness firefly moments or dilemmas in my practice or appreciate them through conversations with students, colleagues or friends that were not planned in the research journey. These significant moments have led me to subtly shift the path that I am taking (for example to research more fully my assumptions behind reflective practice) rather than to carry on unabated.

In short, my professional journey is not as clear cut nor as structured as the thesis portrays. The artificial neatness of the thesis has been enhanced by the deployment of the Hero's Journey (Campbell, 1988) as a metaphor of the journey I undertook. I had to make a judgement call on the use of this metaphor based on a belief that his narrative structure would convey the essence of my journey to becoming without overly simplifying the journey. As I stand back at this moment I believe that it stands up to this test. It has provided a descriptive language whereby I can make sense of my experiences and convey these to a wider audience in a way that encourages dialogue on professional practice. The metaphor of the journey is neither too simplistic nor too complex to allow others to join in this dialogue.

10.4 Translating Research into Practice

An advantage of insider-research is that the researcher has a rich appreciation of the research context and can guide the research to contextually rich insights and knowledge that transform practice. However, whilst these findings are of considerable significance to my practice and the MSc in Project Management at Lancaster, the ability to transfer them to a broader context is challenged by the uniqueness of the situation under investigation. In this section I will consider the challenges that I now face in translating the research into practice at a local and a community level.

In considering my practice I believe that the research project has a transformative potential. The richness of the findings about the actuality of practice and the reinvigoration of my practice through the living theory critique encourages me to develop my blend of systemic and systematic project management. However, at a local level I face a dilemma of how to enthuse colleagues that this journey is worthwhile when they are facing challenging efficiency constraints. There is a tension in my role as a programme director as I seek to protect the space afforded for the supported action learning sets, the open space conferences or the need for practical workshops rather than didactic lectures. I sense that the course is like an iceberg that is grinding through the pack-ice with bits being eroded, fractured or lost altogether when they stick out too much from the norm.

In this respect the research journey has not only informed and inspired me but it has also destabilised me. It makes me wonder if this is the home that I will inhabit for many more years or what I need to change to allow a continuing symbiotic relationship. This instability encourages me to look beyond my localised practice and at a wider community as I think about how I can share the insights that this research has offered.

The relevance of my findings to a broader community is one of the tensions of conducting insider-research. However, Bassey (1999, p. 12) refers to the “fuzzy generalisations” that insider research may reveal that have pertinence beyond the local. I am confident that there are moments in my journey and insights in my research that need to be shared with a wider community.

10.4.1 The Way Forward: Fuzzy Generalisations

McAdam & Lang's (2009) notion of "dream talk" encourages me to create the future that I aspire to by articulating my dreams as a first step of another journey; the one that will translate this thesis into affordances for a wide range of communities. In structuring this section I will return to Wadsworth's (1997) appreciation of the four roles of the Compass, Map, Mirror and Magnifying Glass that speak to different communities of practice.

10.4.1.1 The Compass:

The compass provides insight into the general direction of travel. With this perspective I see the need to communicate a core finding of this thesis to a wider community. This core idea is that the practice of project management is one that is a blend of the systematic and the systemic. To create this awareness and to open up opportunities for dialogue I see that the work on the word clouds and the critical incidents needs to be shared with a community of academics and practitioners.

The visual impact of the word clouds provides a clear picture of the importance of the systemic aspects of project management to early career practitioners. By linking this visual narrative with the detail of the critical incidents (i.e. the stories behind the headlines) I will be able to convey to a wider audience the opportunities and challenges that practitioners face as they enter the profession of project

management. In sharing this core idea with a wider community I would see two key routes to publication. The first is *The International Journal of Managing Projects in Business* which has a focus on case study based articles that promote business orientated project management. The second source is *The Project Management Journal* that is closely affiliated with the PMI. A secondary route would be to produce (after the publication of a peer reviewed journal) a separate article for the APM's *Project* magazine which would reach out to a non-academic audience.

This account of the actuality of practice will also be pertinent to future generations of students on the MSc in Project Management. Therefore as well as developing this into a robust academic paper a parallel path can be trodden. This would seek to convey the essence of project management practice through a series of videoed conversations about the actuality of practice, and opportunities for dialogue with practising project managers within the course.

10.4.1.2 The Map:

The metaphor of the map develops the sense of direction offered by the compass and develops the level of detail into an overview of the territory that needs to be covered.

In developing the sense of direction offered by the map I see an opportunity to use the notion of systemic eloquence (see Section 9.5) as an opportunity to talk to educationalist from a broad range of

disciplines about practices that support the act of becoming. The strength of this framework is that it seeks to instil a notion of systemic eloquence in the development of practice. This representation of practice covers the ways of 'knowing', 'doing' and 'being' that is at the heart of professional practice and provides insights into the core aspects of each of these dimensions. This framework distils the essence of the territory of practice that may be insightful for a wide range of professions (e.g. social work, education as well as management).

Sharing these insights on learning and teaching will be stimulated through a presentation to colleagues at Lancaster University via the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching as well as a journal paper to the Higher Education Academy subject group focussing on Business, Management and Accountancy.

In the medium term this work on the development of learning and teaching can be further supported by researching the appropriateness of the model in a variety of individual and collective settings. As part of the thesis this concept was tested with colleagues and showed potential to be used as a descriptive diagnostic tool that would allow professionals to inquire into their practice and their journey to becoming. Taking encouragement from these exploratory steps I want to more formally test and develop this through a structured engagement in a college of further education and an organisation that deploys professional project managers within the next 12 to 18 months.

10.4.1.3 The Mirror:

In considering McAdam & Lang's (2009) "dream talk" for the metaphor of the mirror I see this thesis as being a crucial moment and a line in the sand against which I can evaluate my continuing practice. My aspirations to promote project management as synthesis of the systemic and systematic, to develop my educational practice as being located in the systemic eloquence of the kaleidoscope of practice and to savour the nuances of my living theory are enshrined in this thesis.

The explicit statement of what I seek to do and why it is meaningful for me is a reaffirmation of my professional practice. Over the coming months and years I will be conscious of the manner in which my actual practice aligns to my aspirational practice. This reflective journey of the creation of a new way of being and the ability to live by this new 'standard' may be of relevance to my professional colleagues. I will reflect on this journey through my learning log and use this as the source for a further publication in the *Reflective Practice* journal.

This desire to explicitly reflect on the on-going journey of 'becoming' will probably include some significant insights into the professional dilemmas presented by the way this course aligns to the context. As expressed earlier (Section 10.3) there are challenges to my practice driven by differing worldviews and competing narratives of practice. The experience of feeling like an ice-berg being ground down by the pack-ice will resonate with a wide array of practitioners. By

articulating these dilemmas and my professional response to them I may be able to develop a support network. Whilst this aspect of sharing the story of the thesis may be less glamorous than the previous sections that spoke of peer review articles that may influence a new generation of practitioners I feel that this is a crucial part of sharing the story because it may offer the support necessary to make this work sustainable.

10.4.1.4 The Magnifying Glass:

The final aspect of this "dream talk" (ibid) is to consider how the findings of this thesis can be developed to develop deeper insights into the practice of project management.

This strand of publication develops the themes articulated in the metaphors of the map and the compass and pushes this knowledge further. By examining the relationship between the students' experiences and the professional Bodies of Knowledge I see an opportunity to build on the work started by the ESPRC Rethinking Project Management Network (Turner at al, 2010; Winter & Szczepanek, 2009). By representing the differences between the students' accounts of practice and the Bodies of Knowledge it will open up a dialogue about theory: practice divide that exists in many professional contexts.

In addition, the educational implications of this divide may be illuminated by contrasting the education content of project

management programmes alongside the kaleidoscope of practice. By using this as a framework of inquiry I want to explore the pedagogy and the content of a number of leading academic programmes in the field of project management. This research study would be of significant interest to the professional bodies as both the PMI and the APM have an accreditation scheme for academic programmes. A study that develops their appreciation about how these programmes develop the students' capabilities in the ways of 'knowing', 'doing' and 'being' would offer significant insight into the education of a new generation of project managers.

10.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented my reflections of my lived experience as an insider-researcher. This has cast light on the inter-woven experiences of researching into my practice at the same time as I am performing it. The specific dilemmas that I focus on here are the multiple positions that I have within my practice (e.g. a director, a teacher, a mentor etc.), the challenges of adopting a concurrency research strategy, the messiness of the research situation and the desire to translate the findings into sustainable courses of action.

In looking at this final point in greater detail I have focussed on a number of next steps that will disseminate this thesis to a wider audience of students, academics and practitioners. This "dream talk" (McAdam & Lang, 2009) envisages an audience for this research that is wider than the MSc in Project Management at Lancaster. It has the potential to reach out to project manager practitioners across the globe and to educationalists working in a wide variety of subject areas and contexts.

THE END

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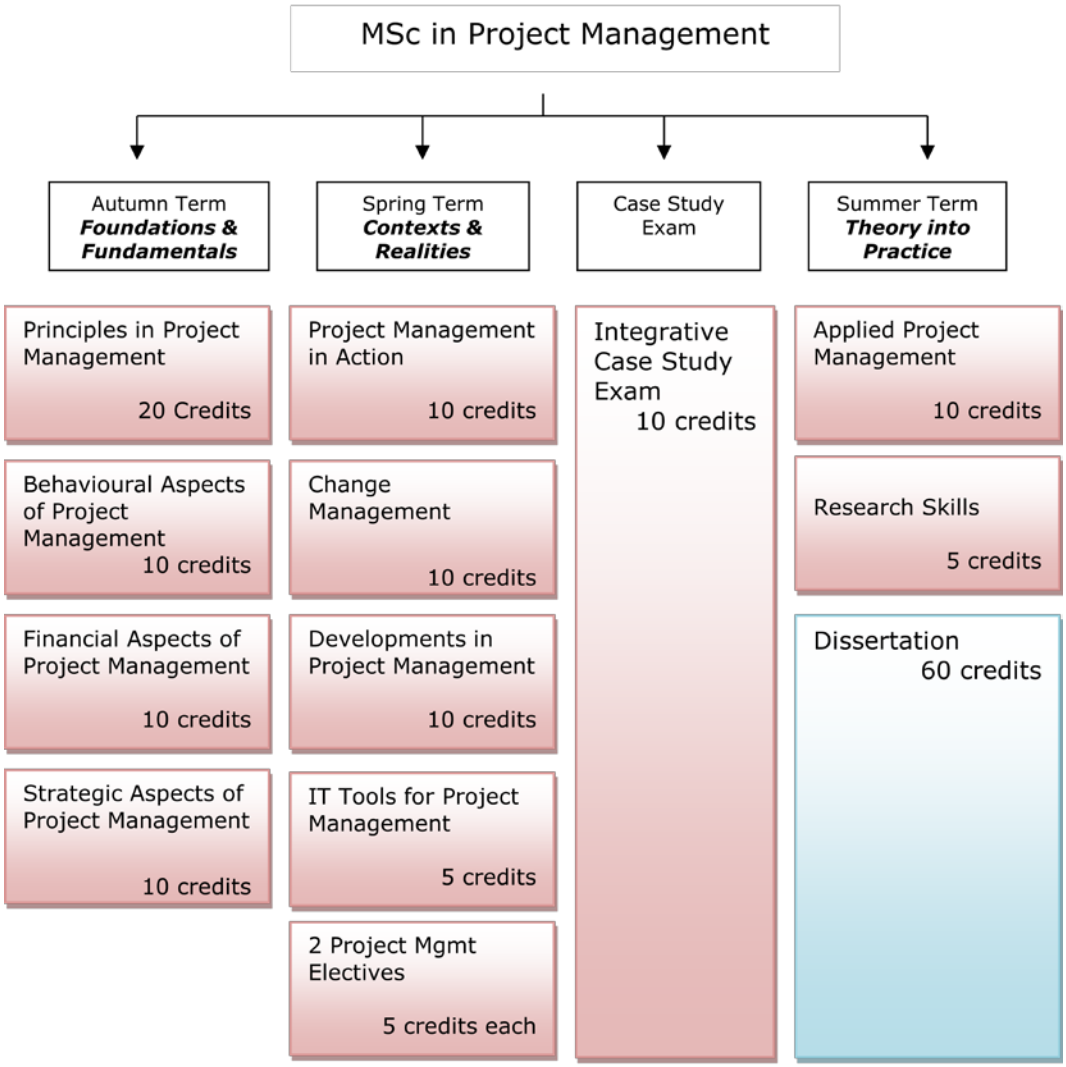
Appendix 1: Overview of the MSc in Project Management (Lancaster)

The MSc in Project Management was launched in October 2002. The course was designed and developed by the Management Development Division which is a process led department that focuses on executive development.

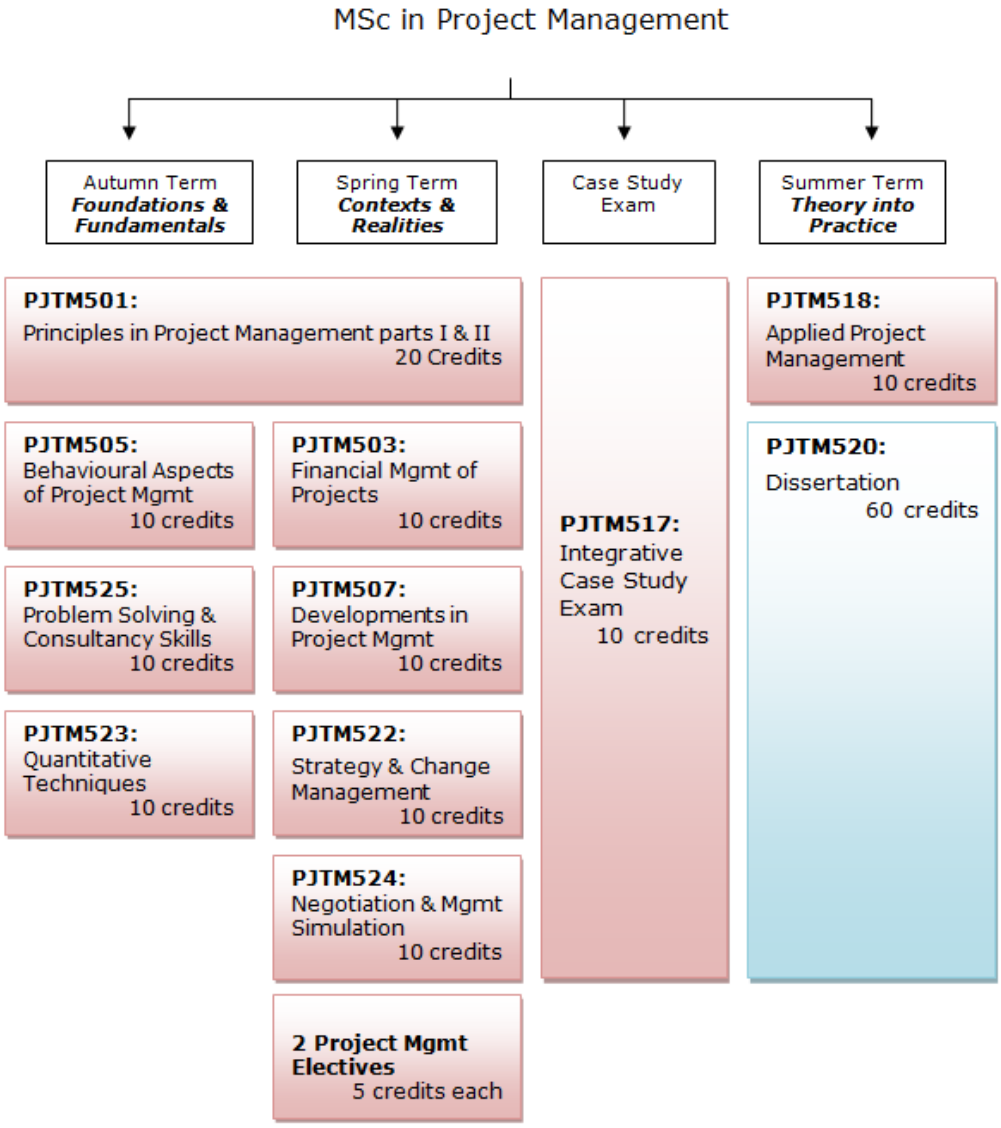
Each cohort of the programme has recruited around 30 students from across the globe. The course has been particularly popular with Chinese students but has also recruited from Russia, India, Columbia, Germany and the UK. The educational background of these is diverse with students coming from arts, business and engineering backgrounds. A further dimension of diversity is seen in the popularity of the programme with experienced professionals as well as students fresh from their undergraduate studies.

An overview of the structure of the course is shown overleaf.

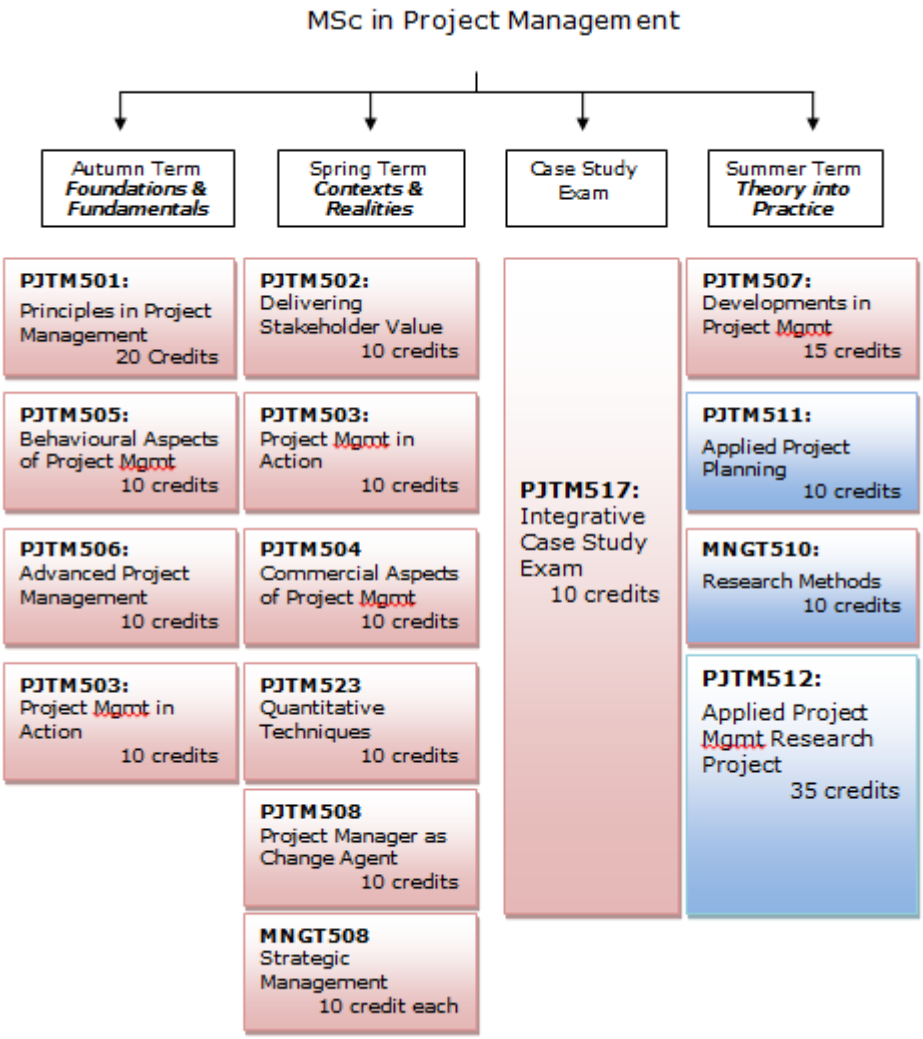
MSc in Project Management : Take 1 (Cohorts 1 - 3)



MSc in Project Management : Take 2 (Cohorts 4 – 9)



MSc in Project Management : Take 3 (Cohorts 10 onwards)



The first three cohorts laid the foundation for the content and pedagogy of the programme. At the end of the third cohort the programme was transferred from the Management Development Division into the cognate Management Science department. This transfer led to shift in emphasis in the programme with topics such as Quantitative Skills, Problem Solving and Business Modelling (the core of the Negotiation Skills module) coming in to replace modules on Project Management in Action, a merger of Strategic and Change management modules and IT Tools.

After running four cohorts of the programme the Department of Management Science transferred the programme back to the Management Development Division. This transfer from a cognate to a process led department has seen a shift in emphasis. The focus of the programme is now on the art of practice.

Appendix 2: Foundations of My Teaching Practice

This appendix provides some further background to my professional practice and the motivations behind my practice and my aspirations for the future.

Introduction:

Question: "What is your title at Lancaster University Management School?"

I am employed at Lancaster University as a Teaching Fellow. My role is primarily focussed on the delivery of Master's level courses (and component) modules in project management, leadership and systems thinking. During an academic year I will typically work on four programmes MSc in Project Management, MSc in E-Business, MSc in Management (delivered in New Delhi, India) and the MSc in Information Technology and the Management of Organisational Change (ITMOC).

Looking at the MSc in Project Management I will 'deliver' two foundation modules on the Principles of Project Management, 'construct' an intensive 5 day Case Study examination, 'facilitate' an experiential course in Applied Project Management and 'supervise' the students during their Action Learning Dissertations. In these courses I am seeking to help the students become 'master' practitioners in their chosen field of study.

On the other courses mentioned I will 'deliver' modules in generic project management as part of a wider degree programme. Consequently these are less focussed on the 'master' practitioner and more focussed on developing 'competency'.

Question: "What do you believe 'Masters' level education is 'all about'?"

My starting point is to consider what the students are seeking from their investment in Lancaster University and myself. This awareness was paramount when I 'created' and directed the MSc in Project Management as I saw myself as a custodian of their aspirations to become professional project managers. They had placed their trust in us to develop and promote their career.

However, education (especially 'M-Level' education) is not only about training, or providing a toolkit for practice. It is more complex than this. It includes the development of the intellectual knowledge of the subject at a level where they want to have a productive dialogue with their peers in the 'real world'. In addition, to this it develops sophistication in their approach as professionals; they are able to evaluate complex situations and to respond to these in a considered fashion. Furthermore, it is about the development of the professional skills (e.g. working in teams, directing and motivating themselves and others, understanding and resolving problem situations in the moment and rewarding achievement). I believe in project management we are working with the head, the hand and the heart and so the course is also about enhancing our capacity to engage in all of these domains.

Around all of these themes there is their self-awareness, their reflexive practice. By this I mean they are dedicated to their 'professional development' as an on-going process rather than a product (e.g. the degree certificate).

Question: "What do you believe your role (as a teaching fellow) is?"

I believe it is my privilege (and responsibility) to create opportunities for the development of understanding about project management. I have a responsibility to the students to ensure that they have the 'skills' (soft as well as hard) to gain employment in a project based organisation. However, I also have a longer term perspective that supports their longer term development in these organisations. Therefore rather than my practice being about allowing the students entrance to their profession (through the acquisition of a badge) I want their experience to accelerate their career.

Foundations:

Question : "How do your experiences as a student inform and influence your teaching practice?"

I can see the link between my current practice and my experience as a student. At one level I am keen to maintain a close connection with the students through a reasonably small class size as I recall the experience of sitting in my first year lectures in Economics or Elementary Mathematics with around 200 other students. So, I think that if I can have a group of c.30 students then I can at least offer the opportunity to them to engage in the subject, to raise questions, to have small group discussions, to know who their colleagues are. I see the quality of the relationship between the students and the students and myself as fundamental to my practice. These relationships will allow us develop our ideas about and knowledge of practice together, to understand our experiences and perspectives more fully and to create a synthesis of ideas … in short the relationship, the dialogue translates 'cold theory' into living practice.

Also, I can see that my experience in a prolonged case study exam during my MSc in Information Management has influenced the design of the Case Study exam in the MSc in Project Management. I enjoyed the opportunity to work as a professional, to understand the complexity of a problem situation over a 3 day period and to have the space and flexibility to respond as I saw the situation. It was with my appreciation of this experience that I crafted the Case study exam which is presented to the students as a 'day in the office'. To support this atmosphere I try to give the students as much time as they require, I encourage them to come and go from the exam room as they please (no escorts to the lavatory), I encourage them to discuss their work with their colleagues (as they would in the real world) and they can bring in any printed resources they wish. In trying to create the 'real life' feel of this professional assignment the initial cycles of the course had a very open ended question (and was referred to as the exam without a question).

A further 'parallel' process I recognise is the importance of the action learning projects. The ability to translate a real world experience into something that supports, affirms, informs and challenges your practice is precious to me. This is in part due to my experience on the MSc Information Management when I undertook a 3 month placement with BT which subsequently led to a job offer. It was through this 'prolonged interview' that I was able to gain confidence in my practice and demonstrate this to the organisation. So, in a similar manner I am always keen to have the students engage in a 'real world' project experience, preferably on-site in the context and environment of the client where they can absorb the richness of the 'real world'. Naturally, I am delighted when their engagement is

rewarded by a job offer (as well as the development of their knowledge of their practice).

Practice:

Question : "How is your teaching practice different now as compared to the way it was 8 years ago?"

I believe that my practice now is more mindful. I am focussed on what I am doing, what is making sense to me in the moment, what is feeling good / odd / uncomfortable etc. This mindfulness helps me to respond to the situation, to get a feel for the 'mood' of the class and to adapt to this.

Question : "During a great teaching session what would we see you doing?"

I would arrive early to class, not only to set up the IT etc. but also to chat to the students about what else is happening at the moment (if they are focussed / tired on other assignments or activities). After checking in with the students and affirming the topic we were going to work on together I would seek to link it into a notable / famous event so that we can share an appreciation of this 'knowledge' in the real world.

For example, in discussing the notion of stakeholders I might share the story of the Greenpeace protests on the Brent Spar oil storage platform, or in Risk Management share the stories of my experience managing a Y2K ('Millennium Bug') project. Naturally these stories

may be a little dated now and I interweave more recent news stories / film plots into my practice to make it fresh and alive.

Having gained this appreciation of the relevance of the knowledge we would have a short session to explore the foundations of practice. This would be a synthesis of different approaches and dimensions (rather than a straight relaying of a 'core' source) and typically draw on the human and reflexive aspects of the topic as well as the product and process aspects. For example, a session on estimating might draw on the 'political' games / trade-offs that take place in organisations, a 'belief' in numbers and the sources of estimating (guessing) risk as well as an account of the practice of parametric estimating.

This session would then be enlivened through a practical session. Taking the concepts and applying them to a working case. This provides the opportunity to work through the 'theory' and into the practice. To experience some of the dynamics and realities of using the frameworks and concepts in a practical session. As time is constrained this is a micro-session; e.g. a snapshot of practice. However, the conversations that emerge from this practice can then link into the refinements to the foundations (e.g. those provided by core / supplementary reading or through previous experiences from the class) and pave the way for further developmental work in the formal (assessed) enactment.

Typically, this formal enactment is a live project that the students are presented with. This project requires a consideration of the project and its context, deployment of a relevant practical toolkit, the

execution of the project and a reflective consideration of their practice.

Question : "During a great teaching session how would you describe what you are feeling?"

Typically I will approach a teaching session with a degree of anticipation. I am not a natural extrovert and so the 'public performance' of teaching creates some anticipation, a quickening pulse and a self-consciousness.

As the session takes shape and I can relate to the students, create openings for them, build upon their knowledge then I am more relaxed. I can sense that they are working ***with*** me on this knowledge and that they are active in our co-production.

My enthusiasm for this co-production will be seen in the humour and story-telling that we exchange, the questions and the responses will make me feel curious about developing the story further. In the 'greatest' sessions I am learning the most, I am learning more about project management through the telling of the story, the sharing of experience, the sense-making that we are undertaking together. So I feel excited; not as a performer of knowledge but as a co-learner.

Afterwards, after I have made reflective notes on the session I can feel the energy flowing from me and I need so quiet time to take stock and recharge my batteries.

Question: "How has the professional doctorate developed your practice?"

The doctorate has provided me with an opportunity to consider my practice, the development of my practice of the years and the potential to push it further.

I see three key areas where the doctorate has had a direct impact. It has encouraged a more dialogical approach to my practice; not to rely on the formal text or that it is 'in the course handbook' but to embrace the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the students about the concepts, our practice and our achievements. It is through these conversations that I believe the knowledge is fresh and live it is related to practical situations in 'real time'.

Secondly, I have become more aware of the ways in which my initial position / stance can influence the future conversations. By this I am aware that my expression, my body language, my tone, my words can steer a conversation; sometimes for the better but also often for the worse.

Thirdly, the writing of the thesis (and portfolio) has encouraged me to be respectful of my practice and also to be thankful for all of the supporters of this practice. The 'helpers' that I have had along my journey has increased my sense of vocation. I need to make myself more available to others, my peers, my colleagues and my students so that I too can be a 'helper' on their professional journey.

Future:

Question : "How would you like your relationship with your students to be in two years from now?

I would like the focus of our relationship to move beyond grades and the 'tactical' and into a more open conversation about the realities of practice.

A move towards a practice based curriculum, with significant cycles of experiential learning that is considered from multiple perspectives would provide a rich grounding for personal and professional growth (for all of us).

Question : "Suppose a miracle happened overnight and you could change everything. What would be the first thing you would notice that was different?"

I would notice that when I walked through our department that my colleagues doors were open and there were a lot of small group conversations occurring. Students and academics would be engaged in a learning conversation about the practice of project management.

These conversations would be framed around understanding and enhancing skilful practice. They would respect our differences and look to further develop through layers of theory, practice and reflection pragmatic learning for a changing and dynamic world.

Appendix 3: Description of a Reflective Process

The following extract from the dissertation handbook (2011) contains an account of how to write up a critical incident. This was initially written by me in c. 2000 / 2001.

"Action Learning Project Dissertation: Critical Incident Approach

The 'critical incident' could be something that you must stop doing, something that you must start doing, something that you should do less of or something that you should do more of. Critical reflections relate to what you have learned from your experience in the project in terms of both the application of theory and the practical contributions made. Remember – many critical incidents are positive ones.

Each critical incident should be reviewed separately and the following paradigm might be useful to adopt:

- Description
- Recognition
- Analysis
- Synthesis

Because it is a hierarchy you need to be able to satisfy the initial levels prior to addressing the higher levels - i.e. your "Synthesis" should be based on a sound academic "Analysis" that shows logical reasoning and connections between theory and practice suitably explained. This approach provides a very robust way of establishing and presenting your learning.

Description

This will include the facts about the incident: what happened? How did it happen? When? Where? Why? Who was involved? What did you observe/see? What was the context?

The descriptive element is essential to provide an appreciation and context of what occurred (and why). It will also provide evidence of your existing competence in the 'hard skills' of project management.

An incident that is wholly 'descriptive' would probably be a general (maybe chronological) description of events. It would not address the key issues raised in the project nor demonstrate an appreciation of the learning achieved by you. The style might be similar to a narrative you could hear from the person sat next to you on a bus ("Well, we did this, then went on to do this and then…").

The descriptive element could be viewed as the foundations upon which you engage in reflection and self-development. It is essential to provide the context but it needs development through recognition, analysis and synthesis.

Key Questions

- does this critical incident demonstrate an awareness of the key aspects of this element of project management (e.g. process, working with people, strategy)?
- is there evidence (possibly referred to appendices) to support a demonstration of competence/mastery in the subject?
- what is the context/background to the 'critical incident'?

Recognition

Having provided an adequate description you can proceed to the 'recognition' phase. This will identify the critical issue(s) for you - what areas do you need to focus on to achieve success and why? What are the important aspects of the incident that prompted learning? Why are they important in this context?

Is it clear to the reader where you are in this incident? It is not just about what happened but also about how the event reflects on you and what it says about your practice as a Project Manager.

It is essential that you are explicit in your definition of these issues and that the readers can identify what is important and why it is critical to YOU. Remember that the objectives of the course are centred on your ability to learn and develop new skills. Recognising and developing analysis for other people's (e.g. the client's) critical issues will have limited impact.

Key Questions:

- have you identified the 'critical incident'? Have you got to the core of the critical issue?
- why is it important to you?
- what is the broader context/background for you and your development?

Analysis

Having provided a sound description, identified (and justified) critical issues you should now undertake a sound academic analysis of the issues raised. How are the important aspects related to theory and/or alternative practice? How does each critical incident inform and illuminate the others? If not, why not?

What do respected authorities say about this issue? Look at more than one source to get a balanced view and provide different perspectives of the issue (e.g. triangulation).

Support your written piece of work with references where appropriate. However you should be careful to avoid the use of soundbites (e.g. Turner (2009, p. 34) says 'planning is a jolly good thing') and long quotations.

Key Questions:

- what literature is there that relates to the 'critical incident'?
- what 'level' of literature have you drawn upon, is it all core texts?
- what models/concepts/theories are there?
- have you explained the key issues/theories / models which you use?
- are there different viewpoints? Can different theories be used to understand the situation from different perspectives?
- how does the analysis help you understand the 'critical incident'?
- does the literature look specifically at the critical incident?
- what are possible options and consequences?

Synthesis

Having undertaken a significant analysis of the critical issue(s) you should now be in a position where you can identify appropriate actions to improve the situation. This stage is known as "Synthesis" (i.e. realising the improvement and making the improvement *real*).

This will provide a detailed consideration of events with a discourse and exploration of the experience leading to an evaluation of possible alternative courses of action to improve the situation. Sufficient detail should be provided to give the readers a sense of confidence that the identified course of action will be desirable, feasible and achievable. In this way we can achieve the confidence that not only will something improve the 'problem situation' but that this initiative has been considered from various perspectives and that the course of action will be able to flourish.

The focus for the synthesis is *you* and *your* practice of project management : do not tell us e.g. what the client (or someone else) needs to do differently next time; rather what you will do to ensure you do not fall into this trap in the future.

Key Questions:

- does the synthesis relate to the learning objective under discussion?
- is your synthesis 'learning from action' or 'learning in action'?
- is your synthesis drawn from the literature?
- how does your synthesis relate to the literature?
- does your synthesis improve the 'critical incident'?
- does your synthesis look robust to a third party?
- does your synthesis take account of the context of your environment?
- does the synthesis rest well with the cultural context it has to flourish within?
- is your synthesis on-going or completed?
- has your synthesis led to 'double loop' learning?
- does your synthesis add to the body of literature?
- have you examined the synthesis from an idealist (rose tinted glasses) or a realist perspective?
- what might limit your ability to apply the learning?

Common Mistakes

Some of the more common mistakes are:

- absence of '*you*' in the assignment – are you taking ownership of events and resulting learning actions
- failure to identify critical incidents
- failure to target the critical incidents at the learning objectives. For example, some people ignore the learning objectives, or use the same strand of argument in all objectives (e.g. project management is a team game or alternatively, everything can be explained through chaos theory).
- failure to use the theory as a means of understanding practice
- repetition of the same critical incident - you cannot get credit for the same piece of argument twice
- failure to engage in the academic literature required to support your argument
- synthesis remaining at 'pro-forma' level (i.e. next time I will use a checklist)
- lack of appropriate appendices, or limited/no engagement with them either in the text. Also the lack of signposts to these appendices
- failure to relate findings to your own practice as a Project Manager"

Appendix 4: Overview of Action Learning Projects and Dissertation Requirements

The following extract from the dissertation handbook (2011) provides an overview of the action learning project and the associated assessment.

Overview of the Action Learning Project

The Action Learning Project involves working with a Client or Organisation to provide a clear outcome to a problem. This work involves helping the client to clarify the statement of the problem, plan how it will be solved, solve it and reflect upon the processes you have employed to develop your learning….

The Action Learning process involves reflection, both in and about action, and an ability to balance:

- Task and Process
- Theory and Practice

Action Learning Project Component Weighting

The assessment for the Action Learning Project combines the application of the project management practices, the delivery of defined products to the client and the ability to reflect on the experience in order to develop future practice. The relative weighting of these elements within a 60 credit module is documented below.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">Action Learning Project Option</td></tr>
<tr><td>Assessed work</td><td>Weighting/ word count</td><td>Submission Date & word count</td><td>Assessed By</td></tr>
<tr><td>PDP tutorial</td><td>n/a</td><td>15th May 2012</td><td>n/a</td></tr>
<tr><td>Project Definition and Plan (PDP)</td><td>20%*</td><td>08:55 15th June 2012
2,500 words equivalent</td><td>Project Tutors</td></tr>
<tr><td>Project Delivery</td><td rowspan="2">30%*</td><td>15:55 6th August 2012
2,000 words equivalent</td><td rowspan="2">Supervisors, informed by Client.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Supervisor Continuous Assessment</td><td>3rd September 2012
(supervisor date to note)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Project Review/ Audit Presentations</td><td>10%*</td><td>9-10 August 2012, time slots to be scheduled. TBC</td><td>Project Tutors</td></tr>
<tr><td>Dissertation</td><td>40%</td><td>15:55 3rd September 2012
word limit 10,000</td><td>Supervisor, double marked</td></tr>
</table>

Action Learning Dissertation

The dissertation provides a formal account of the learning you have acquired from your project experience. It is written as an academic document that presents your insights into project management and your personal practice resulting from your project work.

The Action Learning Dissertation provides your final opportunity to exhibit your abilities as a postgraduate student in project management. It represents the important learning you have acquired from your Summer Project activity where you have been able to apply learning from the MScPM programme.

You should identify two or three important learning events that have occurred during your project. For each of the important learning points, it is helpful to consider these as critical incidents using the approach presented in the MScPM programme.

You should:

- Show that you understand the process of learning from critical incidents,
- Briefly provide the background and describe the facts of each incident,
- Show what you recognise to be the important aspects of the incident and explain *why* you consider them to be important with reference to literature/theories.
- Analyse these important issues, in detail using and combining multiple theories from the breadth of the programme syllabus (see below), identifying why and how your approach worked and ways that you could develop and improve in the future.
- Identify real actions that you will undertake to internalise these improvements. Actions should identify what you will do and have deadlines and measures of success for completion and progress milestones to establish if you are on track. A good action plan will also identify what risks and uncertainties are embedded in your approach.

You should demonstrate learning from your critical incidents across the MScPM syllabus as indicated by the following main headings:

- Implementing good practice project management processes
- Working effectively with people
- Thinking strategically – taking the broader view

Implementing Good Practice Project Management Processes

Examples are:

- Correctly identifying and planning activities needed to complete the project. Why were some activities missed and what were the implications on your management of the project?
- Correctly identifying time and cost estimates for the project.
- Correctly identifying risks for the project. What went wrong that you had not considered?
- Lessons learnt from measuring project progress and performance.
- Lessons learnt from planning stakeholder involvement in the project and how the decision process was managed.

Working Effectively with People

Examples are:

- Working with a specific individual (may be a team mate or Client) applying suitable models to understand a situation and develop strategies and actions to improve the situation.
- Working with groups – how have you organised and facilitated a group event on behalf of the client?

Taking the Broader View

Examples are:

- Consideration of the Client's strategic perspectives to support decision making on the project
- Consideration of the Client's customer's needs to support project design.
- Consideration of company-level financial issues to support project design or decisions

Appendix 5: Examples of Soft Systems Methodology Models

The following is a series of models I have created to assist me in the re-launch of the MSc in Project Management. They act as a stimulus to look at the situation from different positions, a modelling tool to consider what actions would be appropriate from this perspective and an aide memoire of the steps I could take to develop my professional practice.

System 1: Re-Launch MSc PM

An MDD owned system to re-launch the MSc Project Management as a practice based course by obtaining Committee approval, revising core content, creating links with industry, creating 'practicums', marketing the course, inducting the students into the course, emphasising the nature of practice during the course, reviewing the course as a learning system in order to develop a sustainable early career development programme for project management professionals.

C = students enrolled on the course

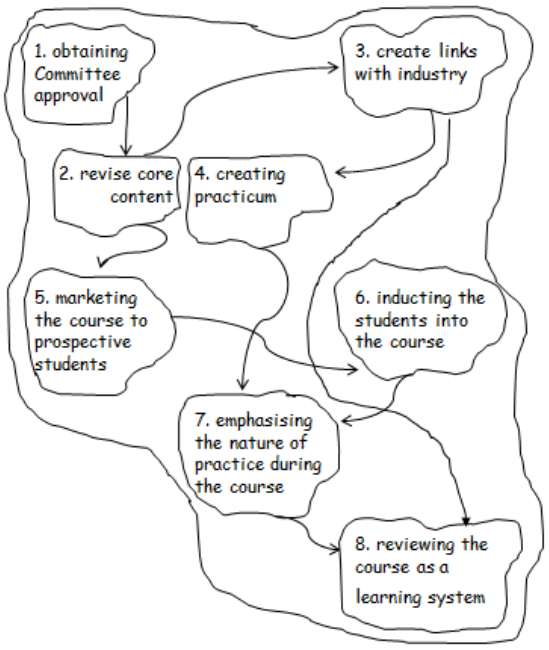
A = tutors, industry partners, students

T = existing MSc Programme (laid down) to Re-launched MSc Programme

W = a practice based course offers a valuable contribution to early career development and a sustainable way forward for LUMS / MDD

O = Policy & Resources Committee

E = competitors, increase tuition fees (Home / EU), need to be efficient through module sharing



System 2: Integrate the MSc Mgmt and MSc PM

A Dean of the Graduate School owned system to integrate the modules from the MSc Management into the MSc Project Management by reviewing proposed provision, identifying possible efficiencies, agreeing shared modules, communicating the ethos and MSc PM content to module convenors, identifying & communicating protocols, bringing in supplementary content to contextualise modules in PM practice and communicating to the students in order to achieve cost efficiencies across a portfolio of provision.

C = students enrolled on the course

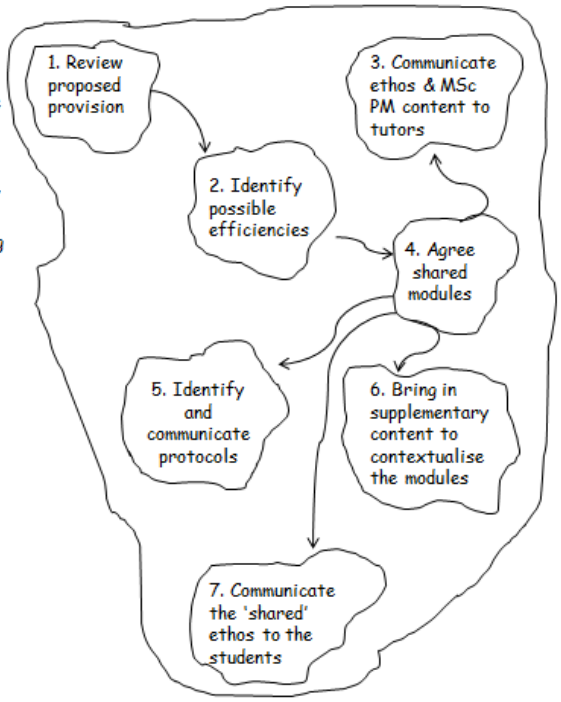
A = tutors, students

T = Two stand alone programmes to MSc Management modules integrated onto the MSc Project Management

W = sharing modules will provide efficiency savings and make the MSc sustainable

O = Dean of Graduate Management School

E = recruitment to MSc Mgmt, different pedagogies, contrasting cultures, classroom size,



System 3: Run a Series of Practicum

An MDD owned system to run a series of Practicum on the MSc Project Management by identifying appropriate modules, recruiting clients, scheduling the practicum, supporting the intervention, presenting to the client, assessing the task, facilitating the learning, documenting the learning output and reviewing the practicum as a learning system in order to develop a sustainable early career development programme for project management professionals.

C = students enrolled on the course

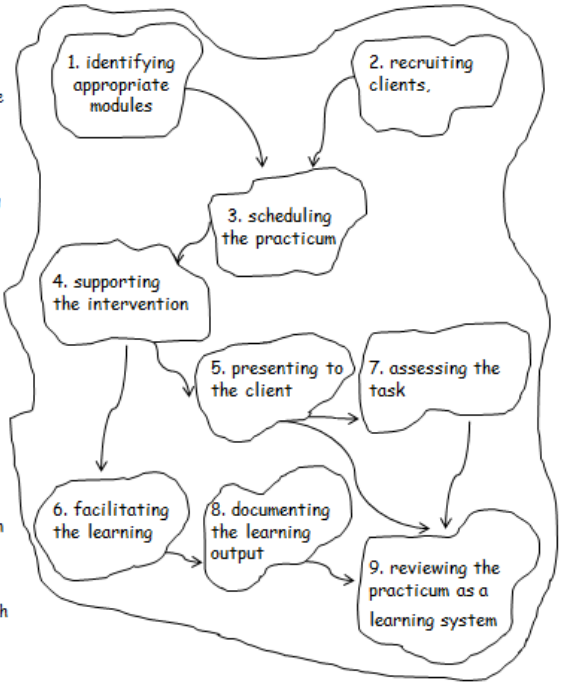
A = tutors, industry partners, students

T = course requiring spaces for practice development to practicums created to develop project management practice

W = a series of practicums will allow the students to deploy programmed knowledge but also to develop skills in 'know how'

O = Programme Director, module tutors

E = conflicting schedule requirements, novelty of approach (to students, tutors & clients), uncertainty of outcomes



System 4: Create Educational Interventions

An Ian Cammack owned system to run a range of educational interventions by appreciate learning context, agreeing learning outcomes, aligning content, process & pedagogy, creating & deploying learning interventions, briefing the interventions, facilitating learning outcomes, assess efficacy of learning outputs in order to develop a sustainable early career development programme for project management professionals.

C = programme directors, students

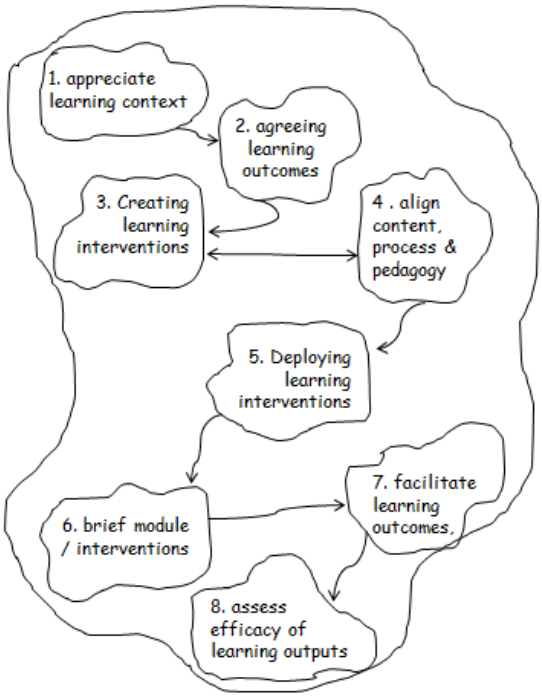
A = programme directors, tutors, students

T = students seeking to develop knowledge and understanding to students acquiring knowledge and developing understanding

W = facilitated intervention can assist in the development of understanding as well as knowledge acquisition

O = Ian Cammack

E = module constraints, educational levels, competing pressures (other time commitments etc.)



System 5: Support Reflective Practice

An Ian Cammack owned system to support reflective practice by communicating the benefits of the approach, provide formal frameworks (action learning sets), provide supporting toolkit, encourage active deployment, allocating learning roles and align reflection to assessment in order to develop a capacity and desire for lifelong learning.

C = students enrolled on the course

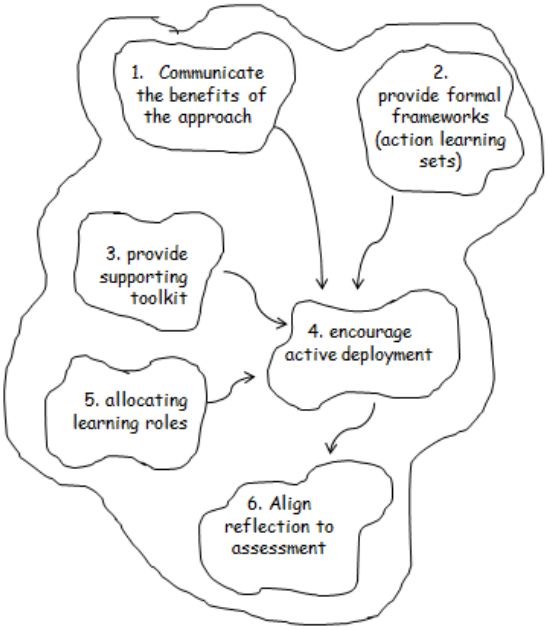
A = tutors, students

T = Reflective practice unsupported to reflective practice supported

W = Supporting reflective practice encourages a greater depth of personal insight and facilitates professional development

O = Ian Cammack

E = appetite for reflective practice, conflicting assessment regimes,



System 6: MSc PM as a Learning System

An Ian Cammack owned system to run the MSc PM as a learning system by establishing aspirations of this approach, communicating the approach to the tutors, associates & students, engaging in personal reflective practice, engaging in dialogue with tutors, associates & students, creating open learning spaces, initiating learning ideas scheme and disseminating learning to peers & colleagues in order to develop a sustainable programme for project management professionals.

C = future students, current students, tutors

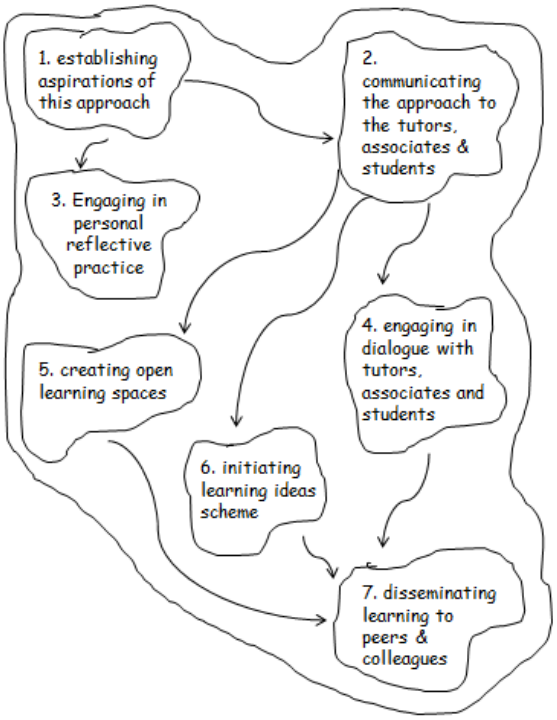
A = tutors, associates, students

T = MSc PM run without explicit learning agenda to learning agenda / approach embedded in MSc course team

W = a learning approach will demonstrate commitment to reflective practice and will provide insights to enhance the programme

O = Ian Cammack

E = novelty of concept, staff : student relationship, internal LUMS relationships



System 7: Engage Alumni of MSc PM

A Programme Director owned system to engage with the alumni of the MSc through creating relationship manager(s), establishing connections with alumni, arranging forums to share practice, establishing support / mentor schemes, creating a 10th anniversary yearbook, celebrating the 10th anniversary and launching an alumni community of practice in order to create opportunities for practice development among current students as well as alumni.

C = students, alumni

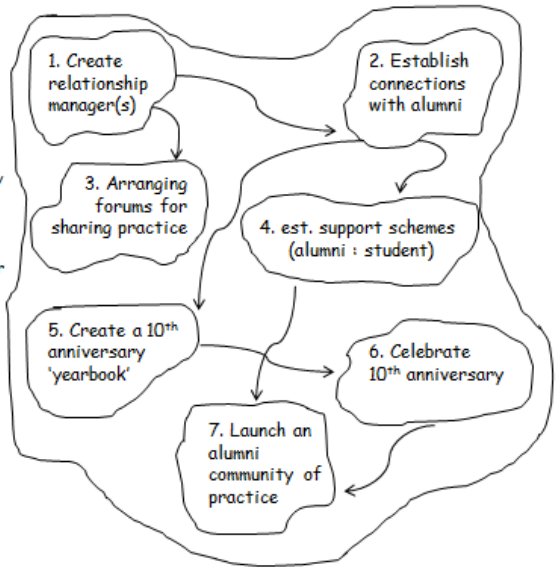
A = students & alumni

T = informal connection with some alumni to web of connections established between alumni, students and staff

W = connecting with the alumni will develop opportunities for practice development

O = Programme Director

E = cost neutral system, time since alumni graduated, quality of experience alumni had,



System 8: Provide Professional Courses

A programme director owned system to provide non-credit bearing professional courses to students (and alumni of the MSc) by identifying range of courses available, identifying a short-list of suppliers, publishing available courses to students, obtaining commitment (fee) from the students, negotiating contract with supplier, scheduling the course, run the course, review short term satisfaction of students, review long term (2yrs +) satisfaction in order to enhance early career development of project management professionals.

C = students enrolled on the course

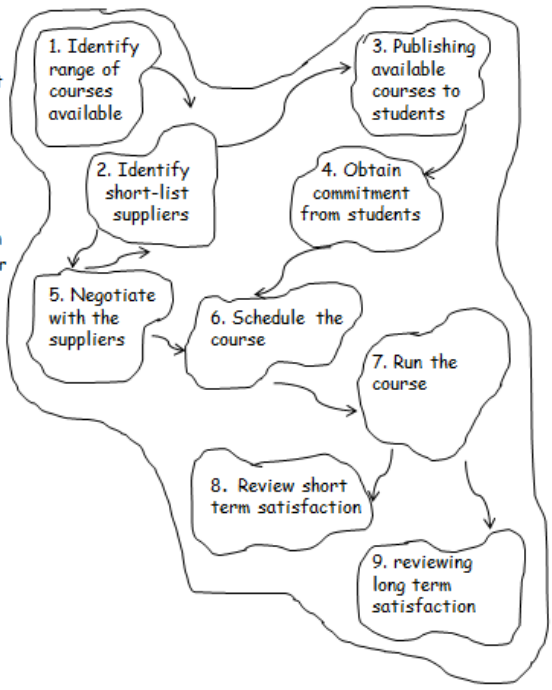
A = industry partners, students

T = professional courses not offered to professional courses offered

W = non-credit bearing courses will provide the opportunity for students to develop professional skills (e.g. MS Project / PRINCE 2)

O = Programme director

E = time constraints, awareness of the potential value, need to break even financially



System 9: Provide a Survival Skills Module

A programme director owned system to provide an induction to the programme that will offer key survival skills for projects / group by identifying the learning objectives for the course, appreciating the context of the course, identifying possible topics, agreeing core topics, identifying delivery team, developing material for the course, delivering survival skills and reviewing module success in order to enable the students to 'hit the ground running'.

C = students

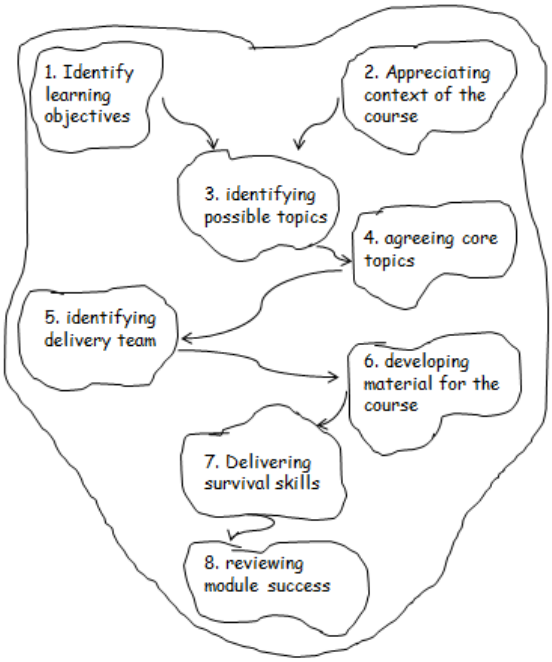
A = tutors, students

T = MSc Programme lacking an induction in key skills to MSc Programme has key skills induction

W = key skills provision will assist the group to become more cohesive and to engage in the practical aspects of the course more efficiently

O = Programme Director

E = early days in Lancaster, different learning style, unknown personalities / numbers



System 10: Design a New Module in Stakeholder Value

A Programme Director owned system to create a new module in Delivering Stakeholder Value by identifying key aspects of stakeholder satisfaction, analysing the underlying conditions for satisfaction, recruiting practitioners developing core material, creating a range of exercises, integrating material and exercises into active pedagogy, piloting the course and revising the content for future iterations in order to develop sustainable practice in early career professionals

C = students enrolled on the course

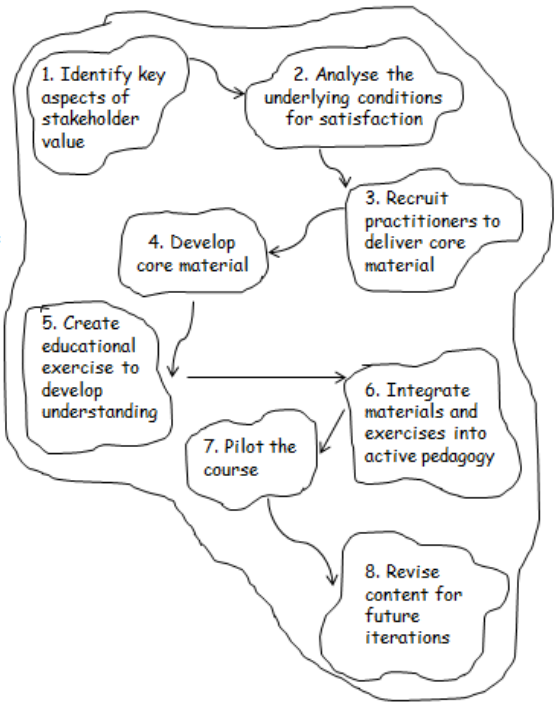
A = tutors, industry partners, students

T = no module in stakeholder satisfaction to module in stakeholder satisfaction created

W = focussing on the process associated with delivering stakeholder satisfaction will enhance the practice of project management

O = Programme Director

E = assessment requirements, prescribed contact hours, QAA requirements



System 11: Attain a MSc Project Management

A student owned system to achieve an MSc in Project Management by reviewing potential courses, applying to chosen course(s), enrolling on course, attending lectures, engaging in the content of the course, fulfilling assessment requirements and graduating from the course in order to commence (develop) a career in project management.

C = students

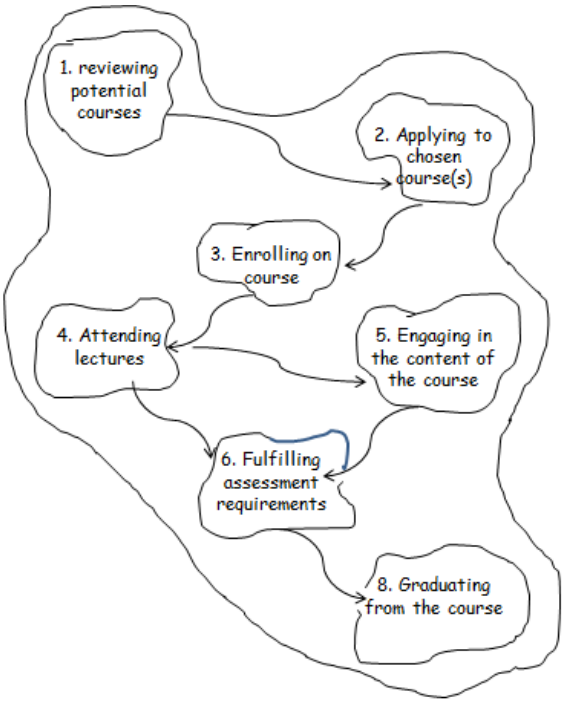
A = tutors, students

T = student seeking MSc in Project Management to student achieving MSc in Project Management

W = attaining an MSc in Project Management will enhance career prospects

O = student

E = academic entry requirements, academic assessment requirements, UK border agency requirements, working in a different (& distant) culture / environment



System 12: Create a Professional Society

A student / student union owned system to create a professional society for project management students by obtaining students union approval, recruiting quorate number of students, electing committee, arranging professional events, marketing the society events to other students, creating links to other professional bodies and ensuring legacy / handover to future years in order to develop project management professionals.

C = students

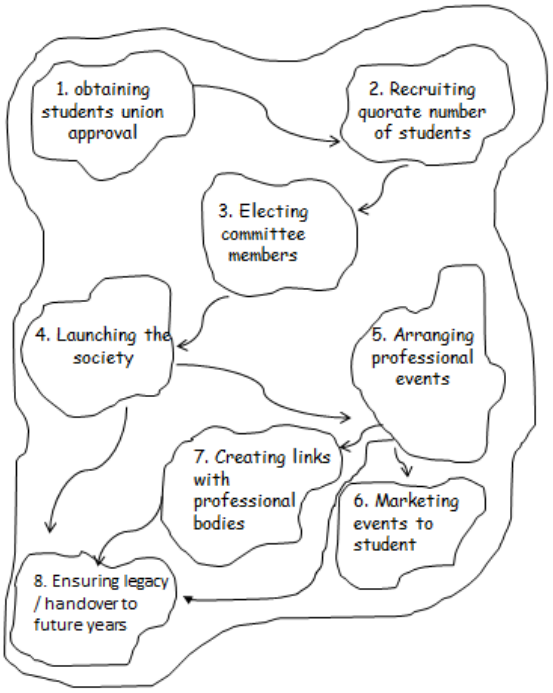
A = industry partners, students, professional bodies

T = no student society for Project Management
students to Project Management Society launched

W = a student society will create opportunities for networking and practitioner engagement

O = Student Union, students

E = range of professional societies in existence, student union resources, 1 year duration of the MSc in Project Management



Appendix 6: Toolkit for Reflective Practice

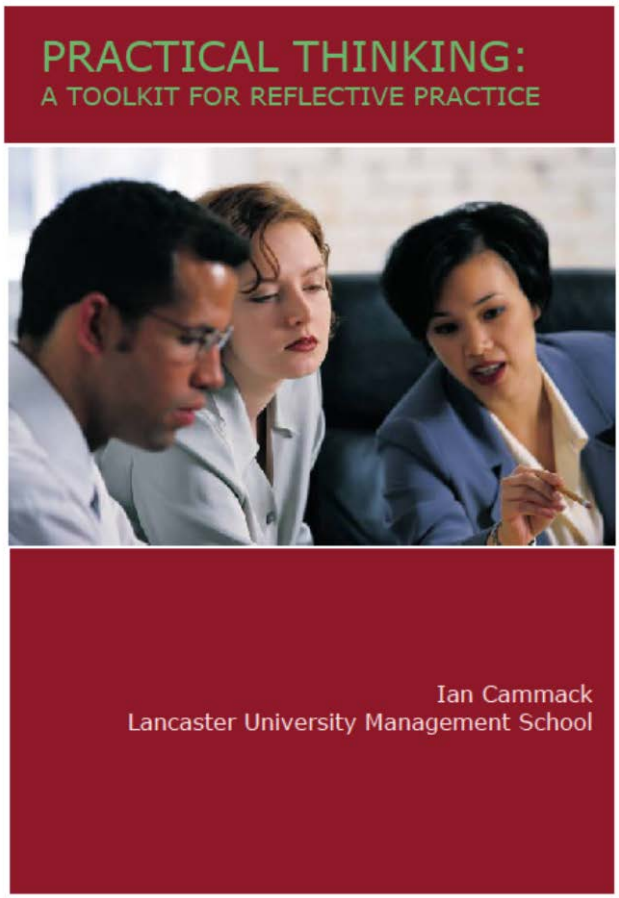
In 2011 I drew together a variety of resources to assist in project management practitioners to engage in the art of reflective practice. This toolkit consists of a variety of approaches to reflective practice as well as selected resources to support reflection into project management, team management and personal mastery.

This toolkit is provided overleaf.

Please note:

Toolkit for Reflective Practice

is attached a separate file. Double click on the icon below to open it.



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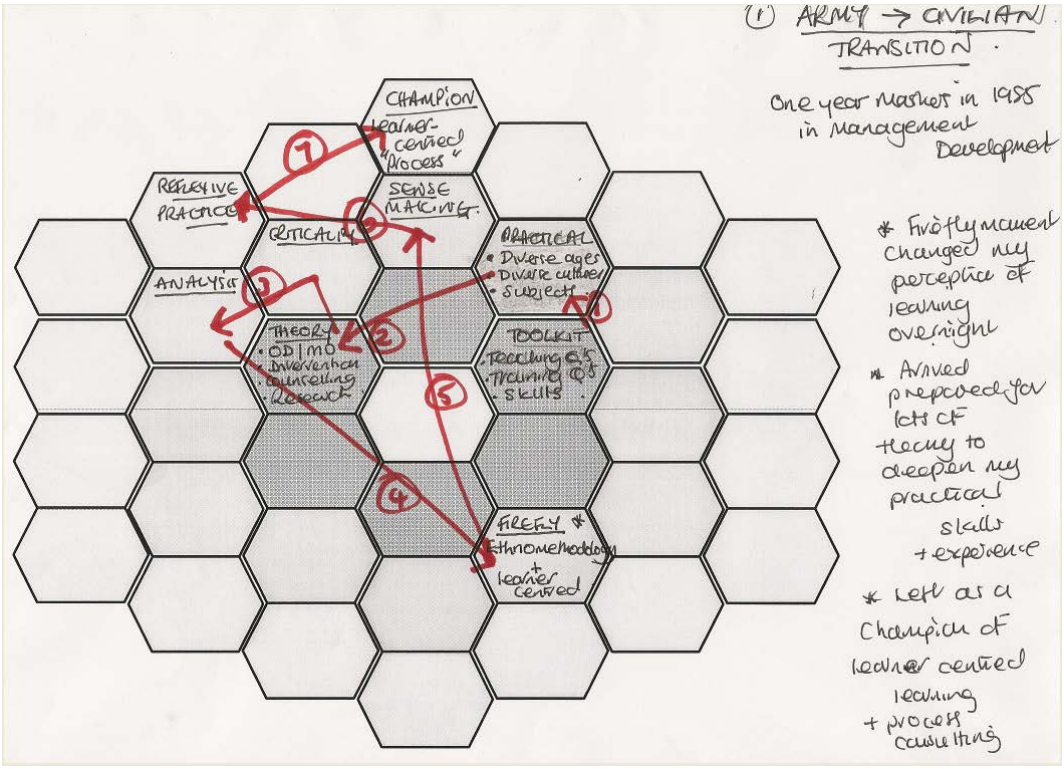
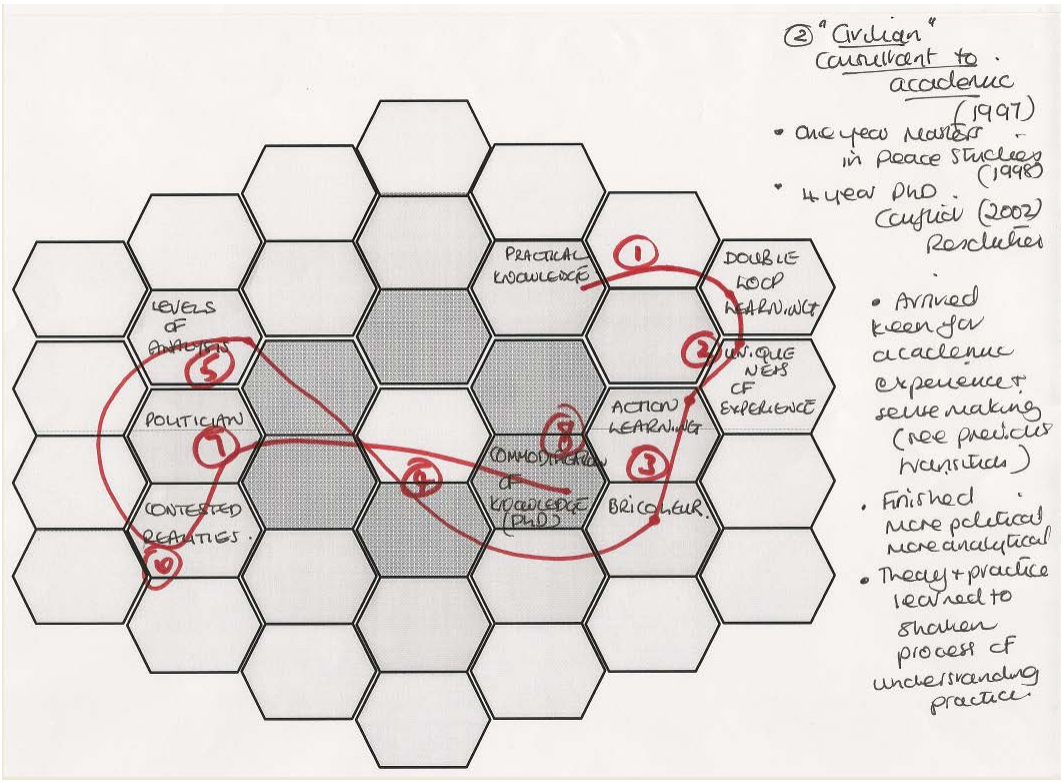
Appendix 7: Example of Mapping a Professional Journey

This appendix illustrates the deployment of the topography of professional practice by a colleague. She has used it map out two transitions in her professional life and subsequently reflects on her deployment of this technique.



Transition 1 from Army to Civilian



Transition 2: From 'Civilian' to Academic Consultant

Hexagon model – reflections

1 How I used the model

I focussed on two key career transitions and made some notes on the events e.g. context, decision to change, goals motives

1985 retirement from the British Army after eight years' service as an officer. My roles had been mainly educational and in the final three years of my service, I ran a resettlement service in Germany. This drew me into career counselling and management development.

I managed my retirement by taking a one year Masters degree in Management Development. My strategy was to create a productive structure for learning that would help me navigate the change. This proved to be a very successful year - I made sense of the practical experience of educating adults (in contrast to

children, I was a qualified science teacher prior to commissioning) and gained access to an emerging paradigm of interpretative thinking and research. My baptism of fire was to read Burrell and Morgan cover to cover.

1997 I decided to leave a career in consulting and planned that a one year Masters could again help me to manage the transition. After 11 years working with senior management teams industry, I was drawn to an MA in Peace Studies. During this time, I experimented with tools of political analysis, embarked on discourse research and realised that my previous practical experience resonated with theoretical frameworks and models.

The hexagon model was then used to structure a deeper reflection of the two key transitions (1985 and 1997).

2. Fresh thinking (about these experiences) using the hexagons

- Map moments of transition in a systematic way and give them meaning
- Illuminate my thinking then and now
- Illuminate the assumptions made prior to joining the two Masters degrees
- Challenged my original intent prior to the degrees – not just about career aspirations but subconscious need to experience learning
- Firefly moments feature – reading Burrell and Morgan, attending Essex discourse summer school – both shifted my thinking overnight and took me down very different research approaches and methods.
- Bricoleur moments helped me to map the moments of transition where I innovated with new knowledge – my ability and need to experiment with

theory is a key pattern (my use of your reflective practice book is a good example)

- Hexagons have given me a stronger awareness of my way of managing personal change